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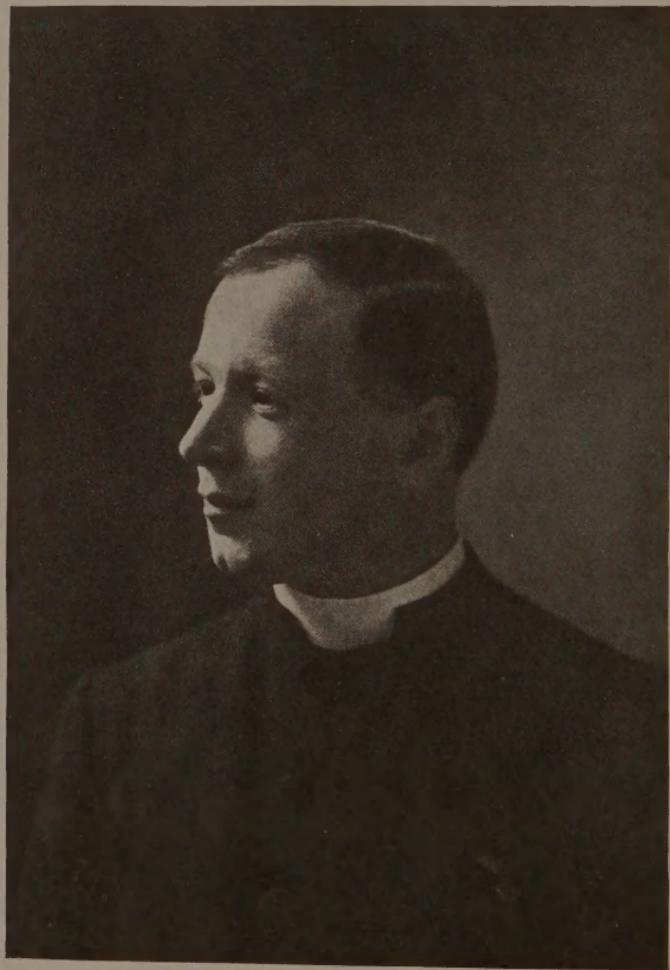


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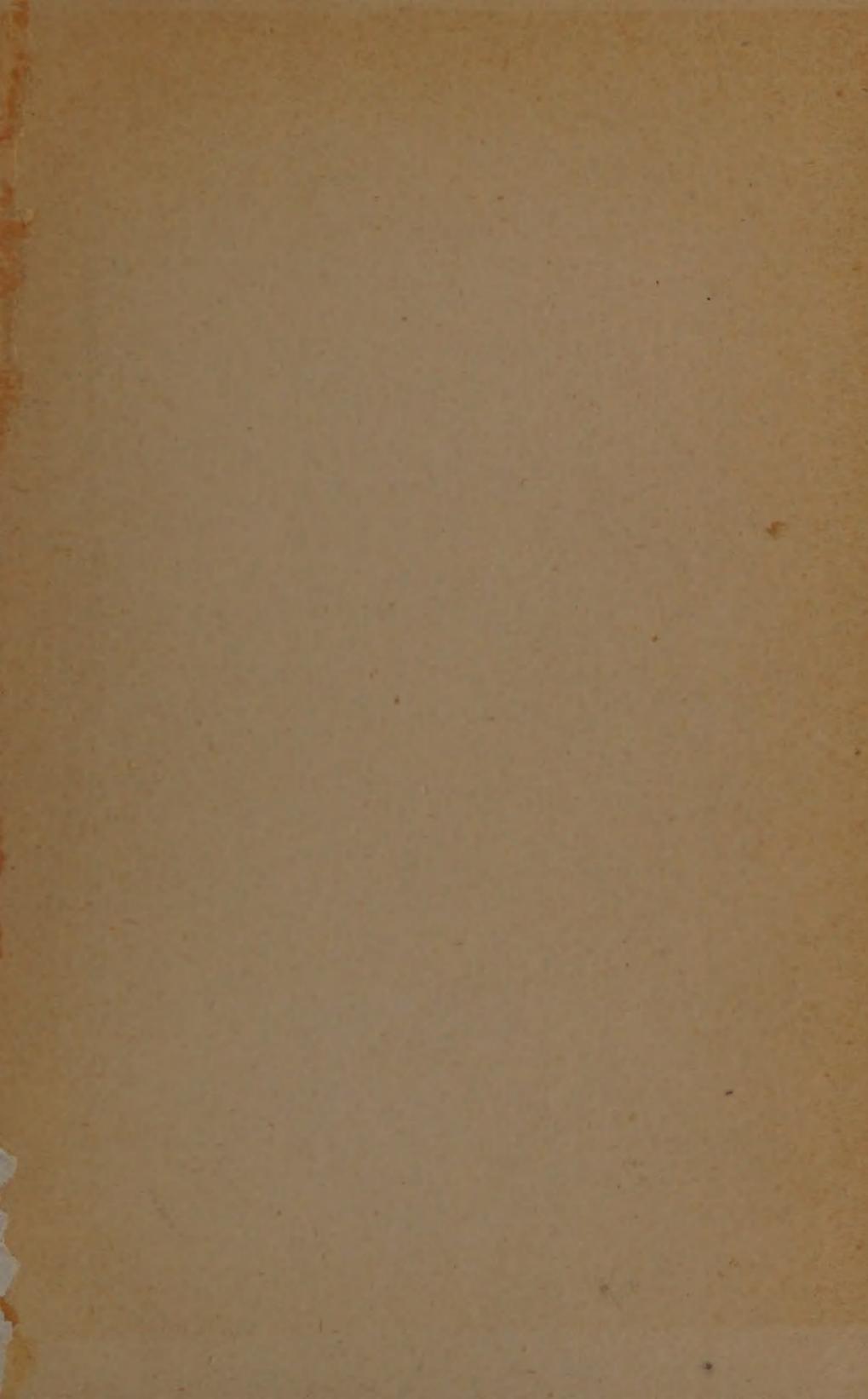
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A
THORNLESS WORLD
" "
AND OTHER SERMONS

BY
PERCY C. AINSWORTH, 1873-1909.

WITH A FOREWORD BY
THIRZA POTTS, M.A.

London

CHARLES H. KELLY

25-35 CITY ROAD, AND 26 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

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FOREWORD

THE wide welcome already given to the work of the late Rev. Percy Ainsworth is the justification, if such be needed, for the publication of this second volume of sermons.

'He Closed the Book' has already appeared in the *Guild Magazine*, but for the most part the sermons were not written for publication. Mr. Ainsworth himself would probably have revised some passages in them—indeed, remembering his exacting taste and tireless industry, it is almost certain that he would have so done. But the secret of his style was his alone, and it has been thought well that nothing but clerical errors should be dealt with. We can only rejoice that he wrote with so much care that it is possible to present the sermons practically as they appear in his own MS.

A special interest attaches to the concluding sermon in the volume. As the footnote shows, it was his last spoken message. Some of those who heard him that night understood, as they had never understood before,

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the true sacrificial meaning of life. Reading the sermon in the light of the story of the sad weeks that were immediately to follow, their faith is strengthened to believe with him, that death is not 'impenetrable darkness,' but the 'true awakening' of which he there speaks.

He was to have preached on the Thursday following at the Eccles Wesleyan Chapel; but on arriving there he found that the service was not to be held. He had intended to take as his subject, 'Prisoners of Hope.' A search among his MSS. throws no light on what he would have said, but the very title is surely not without suggestion. It was the imperishable spirit in him which those who knew him best loved most, and they believe that to him, if to any man, Death came as a Liberator. It set free from all hampering limitations that eager soul which was the very centre of his being.

The story of his life has already been told. Outwardly uneventful, the sphere of his influence widened from year to year. His ministry in Eccles brought him into contact with the religious life of Manchester, and especially that of the Manchester and Salford Mission. His sermons at the Tuesday mid-day services held at the Central Hall will not soon be forgotten by those who heard them. Mr. Ainsworth realized to the full the exacting nature of such ser-

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vices—brief intervals snatched by busy men and women in the very throb and stress of their working hours. It were difficult to find an audience more eager to drink deep from the wells of salvation ; and yet some, doubtless, could not lightly, at the threshold, shake off the cares and worries of the day. But they were not sent empty away. Mr. Ainsworth possessed the secret of that most beautiful of all alchemies, the power to transmute the ordinary and the obvious into the miraculous, the commonplace of drudgery into the rare and lovely avenue of communion. For him, indeed, no philosopher's stone was needed, for these things were so. It was in his friends and hearers that the change was wrought. They went back again, their spirits refreshed, their lives no longer grey, but lit up with the radiance of divine light.

The wideness of his appeal, and the very varied temperaments which responded to it, were almost a matter for surprise. His thought often flashed with subtlety, and the music of his phrases would charm a poet's ear ; but, for all that, they did not pass over the heads of humble listeners. They had a marvellous way of sinking into the heart. The literary setting of the truth may not always have been fully appreciated, but the truth itself was not missed.

It is a satisfaction that his written word is now speaking its message of comfort, of healing, and of

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inspiration to many to whom these opportunities were not granted.

His mind was always full of suggestions for new work. Had he lived longer, he would probably have been known to many as a lecturer as well as a preacher. One of the few lectures he did deliver was on 'Pepys and his Diary,' and he never wearied of the charming gossip of the quaint old chronicler.

Browning's 'The Ring and the Book' had strong attractions for him. He spoke more than once of preparing a lecture on it. There was much he wanted to say, and it is greatly to be regretted that the design was not carried into execution. It is scarcely surprising that he was not conventional in his view of the poem. Thus, while doing ample justice to the beauty of Pompilia and the moral grandeur of the Pope, the subtleties of the lawyers were not considered, as they are by many, to be blots on the book. In his eyes they rather lent meaning and understanding to the whole.

But, absorbed as he was in all literary work, it was his poems which lay nearest to his heart, and it was one of his dreams that they should some day be published.

His own favourite was 'And the Life Everlasting,' which appears both in the collection of Poems and in the Introduction to *The Blessed Life*. He said himself, that he had tried to criticize it more than

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anything else he had done, and that it had endured as much as most from his Spartan treatment of it. In it, without doubt, he sets down for us the philosophy of life which he consistently advocated.

Although Mr. Ainsworth took a high view of his calling as a preacher, he would, at times, deplore the tendency to lay too great stress on the sermon to the neglect of the worship of the service. To him it was all 'worship.' This being so, it is no wonder that his prayers were often as helpful as his sermons. They breathed forth a manly and strenuous religion. There still lingers in our memories the petition that 'we might live our life without excuse.' The words come back to nerve us to that brave facing of life and our own selves which is the true path to self-conquest. This was the ideal he cherished for himself, but he did not apply it rigidly to others. No sketch of his character is complete that omits the tenderheartedness which made him find every possible excuse for their shortcomings. He could never pass without protest a harsh self-judgement upon the part of his friends. He believed in them and in the purity of their motives, until they grew to believe in themselves, not with the self-righteousness of the Pharisee but with the self-acceptance and calm confidence which cannot belittle the creature whom God has made.

Sensitive himself, he was almost morbidly afraid

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of wounding others. On one occasion he was justly indignant with the tone of a letter he had received. Impulsively he sat down to answer it, but could not bring himself to dispatch what he had written. He re-wrote it, softening down any phrase which might give pain. It was not till he had repeated the process six times, each version more lenient than the last, that he finally sent off the reply. A trivial incident, but indicating much. The significance of it is increased by the fact that his correspondent was unknown to him, and that, at that very time, he was passing through great anxiety, which might well have explained, if not excused, a certain amount of resentment and irritability.

The scientific philanthropist might not have found this trait altogether admirable. It is to be feared that not seldom the impecunious and indolent came back from an interview with him richer than when they entered upon it. When remonstrated with for indiscriminate giving, and firmly reminded of the evils of bestowing money whose goal would probably be the nearest public-house, he would disarm all criticism by entirely agreeing with it, and would triumphantly point out that since his general principle was admittedly beyond reproach, he was perfectly justified in throwing it overboard in particular instances.

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Yet there was no easy-going weak indifference to evil. The social sins of his day were ever on his heart and his conscience. His anger flamed hot against a condition of society which starved not only the bodies but the minds of men and women. The story of a clerk unable to live on the pittance paid to him by a big city firm, stirred him to the depths, and the shadow of such lives weighed almost too heavily upon him.

The beauty of nature, of good books and pictures, was so large a part of his own life, that he would fain have them placed within the reach of all men. He had no sympathy with, and little tolerance for, those who selfishly enjoy these things themselves while denying the right of their fellows to them.

As has already been pointed out by others of his friends, there was a very real, light-hearted vein of gaiety in him. He was ever ready to appreciate the humour of a situation, and any gathering of friends was the happier if he were there to share or inspire its merriment. But herein was one of the great secrets of his charm—that he could throw himself seriously into the business of the moment, whether it was playing golf, acting charades, taking photographs, or thinking out aloud what he would call ‘a line’ for a speech or a sermon.

He frankly loved to talk, and would often say

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that there was no game like it. He loved it for its own sake, and it seemed sometimes as if he played with words, as a clever juggler throws and catches the ball. At a cricket match he would gaily embark on the theory that the only real spectators of the game were the cricketers themselves; nor did he shrink from the further step, that the crowd round the ring were the true players. If he did not succeed in proving such an astounding proposition, he at least gave an example of mental gymnastics, which might well vie with the skill seen on the field.

With this love of paradox, one can understand his delight in such books as Chesterton's *The Man who was Thursday*, and, still more, *Orthodoxy*, by the same writer. There is little doubt that Chesterton's writings stimulated this side of his literary gift.

But there was more than a hint of paradox in his own temperament. Reference has been made in each account of his life to his interest in snakes. That was somewhat difficult to fit in with the rest of his character. But still more so was his genuine enjoyment of 'blood-and-thunder' novels. An abstract psychological problem fascinated him, but psychology in fiction had little to say to him. A clever detective-story, or a romance with any amount of bloodshed and carnage in it, these caused him sheer delight, and the reading of them was a real recreation.

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Yet, when all is said, it was the friend who talked to us in some quiet hour at the close of the day who will ever live vividly in our memories. No subject came amiss to him ; no flights were too lofty for his imagination. But he was most at home when he could dwell on the profundities of life. The more abstract the question, the more brilliant he became, and it was often just at the point where most men would flounder and lose their depth that he became most truly himself. At such times his brain would work with lightning rapidity, and the words would keep pace with the mind. His speculations, wide as the universe itself, were often concerned with heaven and the after-life. More than once the argument waxed hot as to whether heaven meant attainment or continued and successful effort. His voice was ever for the latter view. May it not be that he was right, and that he is even now pursuing his work with that painless effort without any shadow of failure, which to him was the ideal state? The conception appealed to him, doubtless, from the very fact that his work here cost him much. He gave himself to it ungrudgingly and without stint, for he was of the few who never content themselves with the second best. A thought to him was too precious to be sent into the world in a shabby or slovenly dress. It should always have as beautiful a robe as he

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could give it. Indeed, he held that beauty was the essence of truth, and that a thought had not attained expression unless it had been beautifully expressed.

It is not fitting that much should be written concerning his own religious experience. This much, however, may be said: that he carried with him an atmosphere which it was impossible either to ignore or to misunderstand. It was like an ever-burning lamp lit with an inward flame. His confession in one of his prayers, that 'we have shunned the wide and quiet places of vision,' sounds strangely to those who knew him—for it was just here, where so many stumble, that he walked with surest step. The thing unseen was to him the real thing. It has meant much to many that he had the power of showing what he saw. By so doing, he himself went far to answer his own prayer that 'life might grow greater for some who have contempt of it, simpler for some who are confused by it, happier for some who are tasting the bitterness of it, and safer for those who are feeling the peril of it.'

The last petition recalls a passage in Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*. The mother of the young Roman patrician tells her son that his soul is a white bird, which he must carry unruffled and unsoiled across a crowded public place.

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Mr. Percy Ainsworth has safely made the perilous crossing with his own precious burden. Whilst he was still in the way he helped many who felt the crowd pressing close about them, and who, maybe, had not altogether escaped defilement from contact with the things of this world.

Nothing could gladden them more, nor gladden him more, than that this volume should continue to shed light on the path of those who are ever striving to make their passage through this life a pilgrimage to a 'better country, that is an heavenly.'

T. P.

I

A Thornless World

Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree.—ISA. iv. 13.

I WANT to speak to you this morning for a while on the work of Jesus Christ in the world. What did He come to do? Is He doing it? Jesus Christ came to make a new world. That is a very comprehensive answer to the question. It is too comprehensive to be of much good to us. Let us seek for something a little more compassable. We need not look far for it. Here it is in the words we have just read together. ‘Instead of the thorn.’ The thorn has always been the symbol of the useless things, the little sharp, cruel things of the world. It is a parable of life uncultured, uncouth, untrained, and unproductive. Jesus Christ came to make war on the thorns and all that they represent. And that being so, you cannot deny that the purpose of the gospel is at least practical, serviceable, and necessary.

There is a poetry, a romance, an idealism about the

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teaching of the New Testament and about the life and character of its great central figure—the Teacher, the historic Christ—that has led some to count Him the dreamer of a beautiful dream. But when men dream they dream of roses. They go into the garden of flowers to fashion their romances. They conveniently ignore the brambles and the briers. But when Isaiah looked forward, and told in words greater and truer than he knew, the story of the Christ who was to be, he said, ‘He shall deal with thorns.’ That is the real problem of human life—or a large part of the problem. That is the side of life for which we need a message and a ministry.

Life is full of sharp and pointed things. There is so much that tears and wounds, so much that draws blood, so much that makes the way painful for them that tread it. ‘Instead of the thorn.’ Does not the very suggestion of these words appeal to you? Look at the picture. Look at the proposal. Something to take the place of the thorns. Let us translate the symbol into the thing for which it stands. Instead of the useless, the vain, the worthless ; instead of the fretful, the encumbering, the retarding ; instead of the bitter, the cruel, the harmful ; instead of pain and blood and anguish—a thornless world. Oh, it must be a dream after all ! It cannot be true that anything could ever root up the brambles and bind them

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in bundles and burn them. They grow everywhere. They get a living in spite of everything. They do not need cultivation. They take care of themselves. There are too many thorns for the world ever to be rid of them all. Life is too full of hurtful things ever to be made much easier and safer.

I can understand a man talking thus, but I cannot agree with him. There is an answer to all that he says, and that answer is folded in one word : 'Instead.' 'Instead of the thorn, instead of the brier.' These things are not going simply to be rooted up, they are going to be crowded out. There is going to be no room for them. Their chance of living is about to be taken away from them. The death of the thorn is to be a side-issue in the growth of the fir-tree. The brier shall languish because the myrtle-tree flourishes. The fir and the myrtle shall strike their roots down deep into the ground, and shall draw all its nutritive forces into their finer, stronger life. They shall reach upward toward the sun, and drink his warmth into their whole being ; and the brambles clinging beneath them shall find no food for their hungry roots and no sunshine for their prickly branches.

That is the way God is at work in the world. The thorn and the brier are sin and selfishness ; the fir and the myrtle are holiness and sacrifice. No moral

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effort that has for its final issue only the destruction of sin can hope to be successful. The motive is inadequate, and the undertaking is impracticable. You cannot fight the moral battle armed with negatives—no matter how sound those negatives may be. Jesus did not come to destroy thorns. He came to grow fir-trees. He did not come to uproot briars. He came to plant myrtles. And as the one grows the other dies. Instead of the useless shall come up the serviceable; instead of the ugly shall come up the beautiful; instead of the thing that wounds shall come up the thing that heals.

That is the purpose of Christ for us all. That is the purpose He is surely accomplishing in human life. It takes time. Some of the firs and myrtles are but tiny saplings as yet, and the thorns are strong and sharp and full grown. It is neither wise nor just to compare the young green shoot with the tough old brier. Use your spiritual imagination, and know that by-and-by the tiny sapling shall be a great tree, and the thorn at its base shall be withered and dead.

Notice how this principle of displacement, this ousting of evil by good, runs through the teaching of the Saviour. Read the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon was the manifesto of the spiritual kingdom which Christ founded among

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men. There is comparatively little reference in that sermon to the world as Christ found it—overgrown with thorns and briars; but much is said of what He came to make it—the garden of the Lord. Jesus knew it was a proud, cruel, impure, strife-riven world. He might have said, ‘Cursed be the proud, the cruel, the impure, and the contentious—and all their ways.’ But He did not. That would have been paying too much attention to the thorns. He said, ‘Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers.’ He knew that wherever one soul began by His grace to cultivate meekness and mercy, purity and peace, there would be one little patch of earth where the brambles could not grow.

‘Overcome evil with good.’ Why? Because there is no other way. No man ever successfully tackled thorns unless he had a vision of firs and myrtles to inspire him. ‘Instead.’ There is a fine positive motive there. When a man takes up a tract of land in one of the new countries his first work is to clear the land of all its useless growths. But that is not the thing that he came to do—just to clear so much ground. He is not spurred on by some deep-founded animosity against those acres of rank and tangled growths. He is not thinking about them. He has another vision in his eyes as he endures, day after day, the strain of that exacting labour. He can see

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wide fields of wheat ripening in the sun. He has a vision of orchard and garden and crop. It is the principle of displacement at work. It is the thing that is to be that is nerving him to make war on the thing that is. The inspiration and philosophy of that man's toil might be summed up in one word, 'Instead.'

Now apply this principle of displacement to life. Begin at the right place—your own heart. It is more easily realizable there than anywhere else. If you sit down and try to conceive of a world in which all speech should be tender, in which rivalry should be without bitterness, in which one man's pleasure should never spell another man's pain—in short, a thornless world—you might easily fail to form a convincing conception of such a state of things. But try something else. For the idea of a thornless world substitute the idea of a thornless life. Think of one man with no bitterness in his words, no selfishness in his plans, no meanness in his desires, and no hardness in his heart. Tell yourself that that is the man you ought to be, and believe it, and you will straightway be doing your first and most immediate duty in the matter of ousting the thorns.

'Instead of the thorn'—'instead of the brier.'

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There is something very uncompromising about that programme. It means something to take the place of these things—a real, radical change. There is the philosophy of regeneration, of the new life, in these words. It is but a parabolic way of saying, ‘If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new.’ It is not the old life furbished up a bit. The thing that is to be is not the thorn carefully clipped and the brier judiciously trained. These things are not to be improved; they are to be exterminated. The better thing to which we are called is not akin to the old. It is not our bad temper trimmed down to a respectable sulkiness; it is not the brier of our selfishness with a few of its boldest branches taught to trail along quietly in the fallow growth of the ditch, instead of trailing so obviously across the path. That is not God’s way. He is divinely impatient with the thorns and the briers. He says, I will grow something better. These things shall be starved out, crowded out. In the struggle for existence I will oppose to them stronger, fitter, more living things, and they shall die. There is only one thing that can drive out sin, and that is holiness. It is no good saying, I will not do wrong—unless you also say, I will do right. It is no good saying, I will be less of a sinner; you must say, I will be more of a

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saint. You cannot be rid of the thorns if you do not plant fir-trees.

But it would be untrue to the facts of life and its existing convictions if one were to speak as if this principle of displacement were an easy one to accept, or an effortless one to fulfil. ‘Instead of the thorn.’ No man can understand these words if he is afraid to look into the face of pain. The King of this ideal and thornless kingdom to be, came to His throne with a Crown of Thorns about His brow. It has ever been so, and it must be so. Thorns always draw blood. ‘Instead of the thorn’—there is a tragedy here, a world of endurance and patience and pain. No man can make his own little moral clearing, no man can do anything to cleanse and sweeten and cultivate and reclaim that bit of the world about him where he counts for something, without shedding some of his blood in the work.

I will not stay to amplify, much less to illustrate, that statement now. Maybe there is little need. The history of this world’s betterment is one long illustration of what it costs to plant fir-trees where only thorns grew before. And if you trace the story of that betterment to its origin, you come to the foot of a Cross. All the way of His life the Saviour of the world had the thorns about His path, but He turned not aside. At last they crowned Him with

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their crown of pain, and He knew Himself the world's King.

'Instead of the thorn.' Yes, that is the law of the new earth; but never forget that the thorn cannot be put away quietly and painlessly. Whether it be a public wrong or a personal besetment, you cannot touch it to remove it unless you have a willingness to bear pain, some vision of the good that comes of bearing it, and utter faith in One who for us bore the whole pain of sin, and saw the whole vision of good.

II

He Closed the Book

And He closed the book ; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on Him.—LUKE iv. 20.

H E closed the book. It was a very simple and obvious thing to do. Every Sabbath day the reader of the prophets in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he had come to the end of his reading, closed the book. Yes ; but look again, and perhaps you shall see beneath the obvious the wonderful, and beneath the customary the unique. He closed the book. Something happened in the synagogue at Nazareth that day that had never happened before. The book had been closed before, but never like that. Never with such divine reasons, such wealth of suggestion, such assumption of authority.

Let us look at it. Why did He close it ? Because He is greater than the Book. The Book was the shadow ; He was the reality. The Book was the echo ; He was the voice. The Book was the forecast ; He was the fulfilment. The Book was the teaching ;

He Closed the Book

He was the teacher. You can in some measure realize the tremendous significance of that simple act of closing the Book, when you understand that the sad, strange story of the Jewish people, from that day unto this present time, turns on their inability to interpret it.

We have the Book with us. It is a greater Book now—far greater. Its prophecy is illuminated by its history. Instead of being but a whisper of that which shall be, it is now also a story of that which hath been and now is. We can read the meaning of long centuries of sacrifice, and interpret the dim light of all religious altar-fires, in the three hours of anguish on Calvary. We can catch the hidden meaning of prophecy, as we read the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Side by side with Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones we can set the story of the day of Pentecost. Yes, it is a larger Book now, a deeper Book, a holier Book ; but still He is greater than the Book. Still there ever comes to men, if they will receive it, the voice that is mightier than the voice of the Book, the message that is warmer and more vital than the message of the Book—the living grace of the closed Book.

We are continually coming to the point when the Book cannot teach us any more. It has for the time being said its last word. You may pore over it,

He Closed the Book

and ponder it, and analyse it : but you will never by so doing get any further with it. Then the secret of understanding it is to close it. Jesus knew that, for His coming had made it so. And so He closed the Book. It was not a final act. It was a beginning. Perhaps sometimes we close the Book as if, for the time being, we have finished with it. People think of that few minutes at the beginning of the day and again at the end of the day, and say, 'I wish I had more time to read my Bible.' My friend, if you rightly understand the meaning of the closed Book, you will know that you have all the day to read your Bible. You must go on reading it. Everything that is worth reading in any book is written in another way somewhere else besides in the book. That is pre-eminently true of the Bible. It is precious to you to spend a while reading the promises ; but if you can only find them on the printed page, what is the value of them ? 'This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears.' That is the voice that speaks when the Book is closed. Thank God for an open Bible. Yes, but thank God for a Bible you can close. Thank God for the truth that is not prisoned in the pages of a book, but that dwells in human life.

'He closed the Book.' He closed it that He might open it. He laid it aside for a moment that they might learn what it meant. While it was open before

He Closed the Book

their eyes, and they were beholding nothing beside it or beyond it, they could not understand it. Nobody has ever been able to understand the open Book till he has closed it. Life is said sometimes to be a commentary on the Bible. But perhaps it is truer to say that the Bible is a commentary on life. Apart from life, from experience, we cannot understand it. And the life is more than the Book. 'I wish,' says some one, 'that I could read the Bible *in the original.*' That is a laudable wish. And that is, indeed, the only way in which any man can read his Bible—to understand it. I do not mean Hebrew and Greek. There is one original language in which the Old and New Testaments are written, and it is the language of human experience. Hebrew is useful, and Greek is still more useful; but life is essential. The deep, original language of the human heart in its loves and its clingings; the deep, original language of the human spirit in its aspirations and its self-consciousness; the language of hope and love, sorrow and need, endeavour and patience and victory—this is the original language of the Bible. That is what I mean when I say that the truths of the Bible become clearer to us, not as we ponder them upon the printed page, not as we grapple with them as abstract dogmas, but as we close the Book and take its profoundest messages into the setting of our daily life.

He Closed the Book

'Like as a father pitith his children.' A man may read those words in the beautiful, musical Hebrew, or in the nameless grace of our Authorized Version, but the deepest wealth and comfort of that immortal simile is given to him at the cradle of his own little child.

'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.' If the great biblical scholar can tell us anything about that promise that is worth telling, it is not because he knows the force and history of every Hebrew root in it ; it is because he knows what it is to lean a tired heart on the tireless help of the Eternal Love. The authority on this text is not the man with the best education ; it is the man with the biggest burden and the simplest faith.

'He is able to succour them that are tempted.' What does that mean? Westcott on the Hebrews has a beautiful comment on those words ; but he does not say the simplest and profoundest thing about this text. No one can say it. But every one may live it. Let a man have a chance, as many a man will have this week, of doing a seemingly slight wrong, and reaping a seemingly enormous advantage ; let him feel the devil looking over his shoulder, interested in the wording of a letter, the figures in a ledger, the conduct of a deal—and he has the chance to know the last deep meaning of succour

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for the tempted. So, my friends, there is a light that shines from the closed Book, an exegesis of experience.

'He closed the Book.' Because it was only a book. Do not forget that. If you forget that, you will make all sorts of mistakes. You do right to call it *the* Book, but you must not forget that it is *a* book. It has the limitations of a book, the mistakes of a book, the obscurities of a book, the impotence of a book. And while it is the treasury of the most profound and unquestionable and authoritative in books, it is still only a book. There is something more than the Book. There is a life, a living passion, a moulding faith, a lifting hope; and they are greater than the Book. This world of ours to-day is very wise; and because it is very wise, it is also very foolish. That is the way with the wisdom of this world. It carries with it great capacities for folly. And this dark world has looked at the Book. It has said to the scientist, and the historian, and the Egyptologist, and the Hebraist, and the Greek scholar, and the student of long, slow world-movements: 'Come, and let us have a Committee-meeting upon the Book.' And the scientist has given us the beautiful story of evolution, and set for us the literal story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden among the beautiful myths of

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the world's infancy—a poem of the world's childhood, with truth at the core of it, inasmuch as it is true that, however man was made and however long he was in the making, in the beginning God made him. And the historian and the Egyptologist have shown us that the far, dim history of human life—of the Semitic people—cannot be read as one would read contemporary history; that there are grave and persistent obscurities as to the identity of individuals, the length of periods, and the exact nature of the original facts that form the germ-life of the stories we read. And the master of biblical language has shown us the difficulty of attaching exact meanings to every word and phrase of Holy Writ. And the theologian—well, he has said ten times as much about the Sacred Writings as all the others put together—but he often contradicts his brother theologian, and occasionally contradicts himself. And sometimes ■ devout and godly soul peeps in at this committee and says, 'They are taking away my Book.' My friend, they are not doing anything of the kind. They could not if they tried. But you yourself will be happier about the Book, if you remember and interpret what the Master did with the Book. He read in it and then He closed it, and made them all look at Him and listen to Him. 'This day is the Scripture fulfilled

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in your ears.' If the Book were a treatise on the physical world, geology would have discredited it; if it were the literal history of a people, the historian would impugn it; if it were written in the interest of any set of dogmas, the theologians between them would have pulverized it by this time. But it is a Book with one object, to reveal Him. When the eyes of all that are in the synagogues are fastened on Him, then have the Scriptures served their rightful purpose—and not till then.

III

Grief-bearing

This is a grief, and I must bear it.—JER. x. 19.

‘THIS is a grief.’ These words go a long way towards telling the life-story of some people. Now and again they have been on the lips of us all. Some day the ransomed of the Lord shall tread the highway of His peace, where no lion nor ravenous beast shall be found. Some day the dispirited and saddened ones shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

You have not said all when you have said, ‘This is a grief.’ You have said very little. A narrow shadow in the infinite sweep of God’s sunshine ; a grey patch of rain-cloud in the immeasurable expanse of blue ; a few wailing notes soon to be drowned in the vast chorus of universal thanksgiving. But we are not going to make light of grief on this occasion. I am not going to talk to you as we sometimes talk to a little child with eyes full of tears over a broken toy : ‘There there, never mind. Don’t cry ; it doesn’t matter.’ It is

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a mistake to talk like that. You know the toy only cost eighteenpence, and another is easily obtained. But it is no good telling the little one not to mind and that it doesn't matter. It does matter a great deal for the moment. It is the discipline of loss working itself out in child-life. Presently you can talk about another toy, but for the moment there is only room in the little heart for the sorrow and the tears. And it is much the same with the grown-up children. Through no apparent fault of our own, our pleasures are marred, and the joys of life slip through our fingers, and the tears come. And when the pain cuts deeply into our life and the loss is a great one, then for a time there is room for nothing else. Life holds nothing else for us and says nothing else to us. We are in a mist that looks as if it will never lift, and it is hard going as far as we can see. The mist will lift and the rough road will grow easier some day ; but that is a thought that, in the first bitterness and bewilderment of trouble, lies beyond our thinking.

But the promise still stands, ' Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' The clouds do not put the sun out ; the flowers bloom again after the hardest winter. There is joy at the end, peace and satisfaction at the end, and a man shall not forfeit it just because for a little while his hungry, bruised heart could not quite believe it. He did believe it yesterday, but to-day a cruel,

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masterful trouble has come and filled up all his heart, and that hope got crowded out. It has to go and live in his head for a time. He must hold on to it with brain and memory until there is once more room in his heart for it, and the words of his creed become full of healing comfort.

There come times in people's lives when grief is such a great word that they cannot utter another—when the past is powerless, and the future is grey. What is to be done? What is the solution of the bitter situation? I venture to think that these questions concern us all, whether or no at the present time we be in any sore trouble; for we know that the grey thread of sorrow is woven soon or late into the fabric of every life, and we need to be, in some wise, prepared for the pain of the weaving. It will do us all good to meet and talk with a man who was prepared for his dark day. The shadow fell on Jeremiah's life and he said, 'Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is grievous'—but he added, 'This is a grief, and I must bear it.'

There you see a man of God in the hour of his adversity. 'Woe is me!' That is the one brief spasm of pain, that is the involuntary cry of the wounded heart; but the man has himself in hand again very soon, and he says wisely, bravely, worthily, 'This is a grief—my grief—and I must bear it.' He was a pro-

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phet, and had not served God for nought. No man ever did. He had got beyond being frightened and bewildered and panic-stricken by the sorrowful surprises and painful changes of life. He recognized the place of grief in the mercy of God. Just as he would have said under other circumstances, 'This is a joy, this is a temptation, this is a duty'; so when the heart-break came he said, 'This is a grief.' It was a simple, brave admission that life must have its measure of sorrow, its hungry hours, its chill shadows. He was not afraid of this word grief. He called it by its name. He appropriated it to himself. It belonged to his life and heart. It had some place in the great economy of the soul—it fitted perfectly into some untraceable divine sequence. It was not an enemy, not an interloper, not an accident. When the grey-clad messenger of sorrow, with sad and bitter voice, crossed the threshold of his heart, and darkened the tiny room of life for him, he greeted him as one whose credentials were perfectly satisfactory; only those same credentials were written in the cramped and crooked handwriting of pain, and in a language that it takes a man most of a lifetime to interpret.

That is what faith in God does for a man in the day of his great need. No panic, no flurry; no ill-considered protestations. It makes a man quiet and self-contained, and dignified, and perfectly patient. The

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religion of the Old Testament (and infinitely more does this apply to the religion of the New Testament) dares to recognize grief—dares to accord it a place in the things that work together for good. Without the philosophy and inspiration of such faith, a man misunderstands his grief, resents it, questions its rights, refuses to believe that it can possibly serve a good and a lofty end. To the worldling, sorrow is an intruder, it is a catastrophe. When it finds its way into his life, things are going wrong, and the best of life is imperilled. He is taken by surprise, frightened, perplexed, shaken. For the simple words of the prophet, ‘It is a grief,’ he substitutes an earthlier saying of his own: ‘It is a mistake, a blunder, a cruelty, a hindrance. It does not belong to my life—it ought not to be here. How can I speedily be rid of it?’

Oh, my friends, when the shadow falls on your life, as it certainly will fall, it will be something to know that the light that casts the shadow is the light of eternal love; it will be much if, without misgiving, without panic-stricken cowardice, without blind resistance, you can say, ‘It is a grief—it is my share of this world’s sadness, bringing me nearer to my share of the other world’s gladness.’

But further, after recognition must come submission. ‘And I must bear it.’ How may we gain

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this power of submission ? First of all, by thinking upon God, who knows the whole measure and meaning of life's pain. How true the line we often sing, 'In every sorrow of the heart, Eternal Mercy bears a part.' God's good purpose runs through our saddened hours. It is then that pride dies and sympathy is born. But if we forget God we reverse this order of things. We grow narrower and colder and harder. We drift into cynicism and pessimism. We are the worse instead of the better for our tears.

Whether amid the things that grieve us we win a blessing or gain a curse, depends on how we bear them. We must bear the pain ; we may miss the benediction ; we must pass into the mists, but it is ours to say whether we pass out of them again into the lowlands of peevishness and ill-temper, or the uplands of large sympathies and braver endurance.

Again, we may become submissive by remembering that quiet submission is necessary if we are to do our bit of work in the world. The first impulse of a stricken heart is to accept the dominion of sorrow to the exclusion of all other claims—to draw down the blinds of the many-roomed house of life, shutting out all sunshine and sound. We cannot help obeying this impulse for a few hours ; but we wrong ourselves and our brethren if we continue to keep the blinds drawn and the door locked.

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For one brief while we may give ourselves up to the luxury of grief, hearing only its voice, doing only its behests, letting it range where it will through our life ; but that must not go on for long. When a sad heart makes idle hands, sorrow has missed its mark. If we live very long alone with our trouble, we only get a gloomy face and a trembling hand—and that is a poor equipment for the world's work. We must not let life grow out of proportion—out of tune. God's work must be done in the world, and a brave man will go out to it, even if his heart be breaking. Perhaps it is well that the clamour, the claims, and the hard work, are always there waiting and calling for us. Indeed, there is so little time to grieve. Have you a grief? Then ask God to help you to hide it in your heart, and go out and do your work. Very likely it will be better work than ever you did when life spelt joy—purer and more lasting.

Yet again, we can gain this grace of submission by thinking of the griefs that other people have to bear. Face to face with our own heart's trouble—the dark figure sitting at the opening of life's little tent and blotting out half the sunshine—we have the splendid opportunity for developing that high courage that they must have who fight the battle for cheerfulness. ‘The battle for cheerfulness?’ I hear you say. ‘I always thought cheerfulness was spon-

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taneous—something that springs up easily and naturally in one's heart.' That is the cheerfulness that costs nothing. There is a cheerfulness for which men and women have to fight, and in the many-sided battle of life there is nothing braver and worthier than that struggle. The coward says, 'This is a grief, and I must share it.' He presses many into the bearing of his burden. Every ear must hear his story, every one who looks in his face must read his trouble; and never a day passes without his making somebody miserable. He is clamorous for sympathy, and there is no room in his soul for one thought concerning the heartache and pathos of other lives.

There is a nobler way of bearing grief than that. Listen to this story that I read in the Old Testament. The Syrians were besieging Samaria, and the city was famine-stricken. Every one was wearing sackcloth as a sign of distress, save the king, and he still wore the bright robes that became his royalty. One day an awful scene, which scarcely bears repeating, caused him to rend his outer garments, and the people saw that beneath his kingly robe, he too was wearing sackcloth. Surely that was worthy a king. That is the royal way of bearing grief—without, the scarlet robe of cheerfulness—within, the sackcloth of a patient unobtrusive mourning.

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The clenched hand, and the tightened lips, and the grim, tense silence are not the signs of a man's triumph over his grief. That comes when the hand is stretched out to hearten his brother and the lips have learned the music of consolation. That comes when over the sackcloth of our heart's sadness we have cast the bright mantle of a cheerful spirit.

So, my friends, in the name of the Man of Sorrows who pleased not Himself, for the sake of the work that waits our doing, for the sake of a world that has a sadder heart than we ever guess, let us go out of the darkened room of our experience with a smile and a song and a word of cheer. So shall God give back to us the light with which we seek to brighten other lives. This is the victorious bearing of grief. This is brave living. This is the triumph of religion.

IV

The Burden of the Valley of Vision

The burden of the valley of vision.—ISA. xxii. 1.

WE do not associate visions in life either with a burden or a valley. We do not think of the seer as a weary man. We have never credited the toiler with seeing much. If there be visions for men, they must leave the day's work in order to behold them. We have, maybe, counted our own busiest and weariest hours lost hours in this matter of seeing visions. And one reason for this way of thinking is that we have always linked vision with the hills. We do not speak of the valley of vision. When we speak of vision we think of hill-tops, of high places, leagues of light and air and a measureless horizon. The hill of vision we know. We are always longing to climb it. The red glory of its far peaks is ever luring us on. Ofttimes we are too busy and too weary here in the valley to climb to the crest of the hill for the larger view and the ampler air; but we look up to the height, and

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that upward look counts for something in our daily life. There is always light on the hills of hope ; and we who live at the foot of these hills learn to live our life by the light that crowns them.

Love watches on the mountain height,
It is right precious to behold
The first long surf of climbing light
 Flood all the thirsty East with gold ;
But we, who in the shadow sit,
 Know also when the day is nigh,
Seeing thy shining forehead lit
 With his inspiring prophecy.

But, my friends, that is not the only light by which God means us to live. There is a *valley* of vision. It is, if you like, the valley in which we walk day by day. We know it well as a vale of toil. We know the burden of the valley of toil. Some know it as well, or even more intimately, as a vale of tears—the burden of the valley of sorrow. We work in the valley, and we suffer in it. But perhaps, if we really knew our little valley as well as long familiarity leads us at times to think we know it, we should find it the valley of vision. We should see in it.

What should we see? I think we should see tiny flowers starring the path-side. And there is as much to learn from the cup of a flower as from the horizon, the rim of the world. After all, the blue of a

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forget-me-not and the blue of the distant hills are parts of the same vast wonder of beauty. We should see little brooks of joy sparkling at our feet. And the light on their ripples is one with the light on the face of the sea. We should see men and women bearing burdens, not because they must bear them, but because for love's sake they choose to stoop under them; and these lowly ministries and the infinite unselfishness of God are parts of the same high sacrament of love. We should see the angel-messengers of God coming down the hill-sides and bringing whispers of peace and gifts of strength to the places where men hope and weep and pray. We should see here that the valley grows wider and wider as we pass through it, and that at the far end of it there glimmer the plains of peace.

Poetry, you say, mere poetry! Yes, I think it is poetry, and therefore it is the truth. The prose which you think so reliable is sometimes true, but poetry is always true. If it is not true, it is not poetry. Shall I put it into prose for you? It seems a pity, for it means leaving half of it out. But here it is—as much of it as can be expressed in the narrower and more fettered medium. Only, my friend, do not pride yourself, as some do, on your contempt for poetry. Do not think, because you call yourself a plain man, that you have proved

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yourself a wise one. You have not asked the best when you have clamoured for plain speech. The highest and the largest truth about life was never got into what is commonly called plain speech, and never will be.

However, that by the way. To come to our prose—which, in some people's judgement, is another word for coming to our senses. The places of vision in life—the places where we see the deeper meanings, and the hidden beauty, and the profound reasonableness, and the eternal purpose of the things that go to make life—are not a few lofty and occasionally accessible peaks of experience. All that life has to teach us is not written on a far horizon. There is a revelation in near and lowly things. That is a truth that Jesus has given to the world. Ever since He walked in the vale of toil and tears it has been for men a valley of vision. The raiment of the lilies, the blades of grass, the seed-time and the sheepfold, and a man's love for his son, and all the simple things that make our complex life, were full of light for Him. He saw, too, the possibility of purity in the Magdalene, of tenderness in the son of Thunder, of heroism in Peter the fisherman, of something holy in every human soul. And these are the things that you and I, by the grace of Christ, may see—things we should see but for the sin of our souls; and

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seeing them, the valley of life is the valley of vision.

But, my friends, these are thoughts suggested by the text rather than the thought contained in it. Isaiah was not speaking of the vision of the valley of burden, but of the burden of the valley of vision. For this man the burden did not bring the vision ; but the vision brought the burden. His weariness did not make him a seer. It was his vision that made him weary. He had seen something that laid a weight upon his spirit. Upon the actual vision that Isaiah saw we must not linger. It would mean finding—under the guidance, be it said, of Professor George Adam Smith—the meaning of the somewhat obscure chapter of which our text is the headline. Just to put the vision into a sentence or two, Isaiah looked out on a joyous town, a people revelling on their house-tops and holding high carnival. But he saw the awful meaning of that mad holiday. Their unholy alliance with Egypt had failed them. Their allies, the Egyptians, had been beaten, and the Assyrians were upon them. And with the failure of their material hope there came a sudden collapse of their merely formal religion ; and they turned to mad revelry with the desperation of the faithless, resourceless soul. In a word, Isaiah saw through appearances into the last reality of things. He

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passed, lonely and bowed down, into the valley of vision. And there is vision in life waiting every man, not to lighten the load of life for him, but to lay a heavier weight upon his heart. There is no burden in all the world like unto his burden who has had the courage and sincerity, patience and faith, to enter the valley of vision.

There is one valley we are loth to enter, and the name of it is humiliation. And the word spoken at the gate of that valley, the 'open sesame,' is this, 'Know thyself.' Every man gets glimpses of himself, in the traffic of the high road, in the meetings and the greetings, in fellowships and dealings; and sometimes his life is not found of him good to look upon. And he calls to himself all his resources—the pride of life, the beguiling interest of outward things, the blind praises of a world that knows him not; and goes on his way forgetting 'what manner of man he is.' Light-hearted and philosophic, his world calls him; but he has turned his back on the everlasting joy and the fathomless wisdom of the humble and the penitent: he has refused the priceless burden of a broken and a contrite heart—the burden of the valley of vision.

More often and in more ways than we can count has God opened to us the gate of this valley, and the pride and the fear of our hearts would not let us

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enter. The world is loth to go where it cannot take its gaieties, and its levities, and its shallow self-satisfactions, and its unsound self-respect. But it is only when a man stoops beneath the burden of this valley—the burden of humbling self-knowledge—that he can find a truly glad heart. The perfect life, the sinless life, has been lived among men. The ideal has taken shape before our eyes. And the way to the ideal always lies through the valley. Jesus calls the heavy-laden unto Him to give them rest. But let us not misread that gift. It is rest from bitter remorse and vain regret, rest from the burden of a wrong-laden past, rest from the weight of unprofitable anxieties and fruitless disquietude; but He lays upon all who come to Him a burden—none the less a burden because it steadies and strengthens the man who bears it—the weight of realized imperfections and of responsibility for a character that is yet so far from the divine and Christly ideal.

But as there is a valley of vision where a man walks alone with the Christ and bends beneath the judgement of a perfect purity, so also there is a valley of vision where a man beholds some measure of the sin and suffering of his fellows, and bends beneath the burden of this sad, strange world of human life.

We stand to-day face to face with a new social

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ideal. Men are learning, as never before, to live for men. The words 'the people' are not a vague term, having no significance for the individual. As Isaiah stood at the door of his house in Jerusalem, and read all the shame and vanished faith that the revelry of the city betokened, and took the pity of it and the peril of it into his own heart, so are men learning to look upon human life to-day. The problem of the many is coming home to individual hearts and consciences. The man whose bread is sure is concerned about his brethren who are hungry. The woman whose life is set amid the sweet protections of a love-lit home is taking to her heart the pain and peril of her sister who is compelled to live her life face to face with the shames of the world. Thus the Christ, the Saviour of the world, is leading men day by day down into the deep places of human wrong and pain and need, and the burden upon their hearts is the burden of the valley of vision.

And now, my friends, the question comes, What do you and I know of this valley? How much of this burden of vision have we taken upon our shoulders—upon our hearts? Have we accepted the stern, humbling, merciful judgement of the Christ upon our own character? Have we passed, are we passing ever further, into the valley of self-knowledge, of confession and contrition, where all lasting amend-

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ment and attainment begin? And how stands it with us in regard to a sin-stained and suffering world? Are we content to have selfish enjoyment of the flowers of happiness and peace and success that grow in our little garden, or are we willing to know and endeavouring to know something of the pathos and tragedy hidden in what Ruskin calls 'the darkness of the terrible streets'? In a word—for it all can be reduced to this—are we following Jesus Christ? He it is who in His mercy and power reveals and cleanses the worst and fulfils the best in every human heart that receives Him; and it is He alone who can give us grace to see and suffer for our brethren. His hand alone can bind upon our hearts and help us to bear the twofold burden of the valley of vision.

V

The Man in Sackcloth

For none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.—ESTHER iv. 2.

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.—ROM. xv. 1.

THERE are two ways of approaching the question of pain. One is through our own personal share of it ; the other is through the suffering of our fellow creatures. In the nature of things the former is by far the more familiar method of approach. When the mind arises to face the problem of suffering, it does not have to go far afield for its data and its illustrations. They are ready to hand. Each man does at least a little bit of reading in the book of suffering—a book that has no preface to explain its drift, no footnotes to throw light upon its misty passages ; a book that is published year after year in the great printing-press of human experience. And the more often that book is set in a man's hands, and the more he has to read in it for himself, the greater is his ability to interpret some of its

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obscure and bitter passages for those to whom life has allotted a similar task.

But we are also called upon to approach the problem and the fact of pain apart from our own individual experience of it. And it is this duty and all that relates to it that I wish to consider just now. It is upon this aspect of the question of pain that Christianity makes its most unique and distinctive pronouncement. Concerning a man's own sufferings the Greek and Roman philosophers said some very fine and noble things. The Epicurean and the Stoic alike strove to inculcate an attitude towards personal suffering not devoid of dignity and moral value. But towards the suffering of others they showed a hard face. Pre-Christian philosophy never struck the deep, authentic note of sympathy. It was left to the gospel of Jesus Christ to teach men the wider obligations of their common humanity and their true relation to the aching world.

Look for a moment at the non-Christian attitude towards the world's sufferers. It is truly, and even dramatically, illustrated for us by this old law that obtained in the court of the Persian kings. 'None might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.' This was the king's argument. 'There are the sorrowful, the sick, and the destitute in my city. Men fall on evil times and bear grievous burdens and suffer

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many infirmities. But what is all this to me? Nothing. There are other things beside gladness and laughter in the streets ; but I will not see them. And out of sight, out of mind.' And so he said to the men that kept his palace gates, 'Admit the singers and the dancers, admit the men with bright garments and smiling faces, give abundant entrance to the mirth and splendour of the city ; but when the man in sackcloth draws near—the man with pain-pale face and pain-bent body—close the gate. Tell him to hide in his house till the bitterness be overpast. I want no death's head at my feast. I will have no wail of distress mingling with the music and the singing.' That was Persia twenty-five centuries ago, and that is the world to-day, when you come to look into things. We have outgrown the brutal frankness ; but you can hear the same thing said still —rather more politely. And polite speech is a poor disguise for a selfish heart. After all, whether the gate is slammed in the sufferer's face or whether he is more courteously apprised of the absence of any sympathy and any possibility of admittance into the house of help, it comes to the same thing. The world opens its gates to the man who can minister to its pleasures or increase its gains, but if you study that gateway carefully you will decipher this inscription, 'Sackcloth and ashes not admitted.' The world

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has made for itself a law of ignorance. It has said 'I will not know.' It does not attempt to solve the problem of pain ; much less does it recognize its duty toward them that suffer. It simply shelves the question. Welcome, purple and fine linen ; but sack-cloth—the less said about that the better.

You may be thinking that the existence of extensive and well-organized and generously supported charities for the sick and helpless in this city, and similar organizations all over the civilized world, are a flat contradiction to all that I am saying. But, I pray you, have a little patience, and remember—I am speaking of the world in as far as it resists the influence and ignores the principles of Christianity. Christ came to open that closed gate. He came to alter the inscription graven over the portal of every man's life. And so it comes to pass that ever over more gateways you find the old inscription erased and the new one graven ; and instead of reading 'Sackcloth and ashes not admitted,' you can read 'We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.' But be fully assured that wherever you see that word written, you see the victory of Jesus over the selfishness of the human heart. The kingship of wealth, and learning, and strength, would never have opened its palace-gates to the weak and the sick and the needy, and to

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all who cannot help themselves, had not the King with the crown of thorns and the wounded hands first knocked at these gates and asked admission in the name of the Father by whom all men are brethren, in the name of the Cross that proclaims the beauty of unselfishness, the worth of sacrifice, and the eternity of love.

And now let us see what this new inscription means—this word of Jesus in the lips of Paul. ‘We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.’ ‘Ought to bear.’ It is not a matter of sentiment ; it is a bounden duty. It is a part of the moral content of Christianity. It is a part of the Christian interpretation of human life. Our strength belongs to the weak, our vision to the blind, our health to the infirm, and our life to the brotherhood. This is the *noblesse oblige* of the Christian Faith. Wealth has no right to pose as the patron of poverty ; learning has no right to say to ignorance, ‘See, in my gracious condescension I give you some of my beautiful treasure.’ Strength has no right to say to weakness and to pain, ‘I am minded in my condescension and good-will to suit my strong stride to your halting steps for awhile.’ Out on all such help, that dishonours the man that offers it and the life that accepts it ! ‘We that are strong *ought* to bear the infirmities of the weak.’ Let the sense of the

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divine demand—let the law of life as God means us to live it—be in our hearts ; and then shall we be able to serve men in a fashion that does some honour to our common manhood and helps to make our brotherhood in Jesus Christ a realized fact in human life.

We ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, for their sakes, and also for ours. ‘None might enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth.’ We are inclined to pity the poor and the weak and the sick waiting in vain at those inexorable gates ; but he who kept them closed was the greater loser. He could have well afforded to have parted with a few jewels ; but, had he but known it, he could ill afford to forgo the gracious, life-enriching opportunity of service—the priceless right to help his weak brother. Oh, this closed and guarded gateway beneath which the sick and needy may not pass ! Oh, this indifference and self-pleasing ! The world thinks it gains by it. It imagines it is better off for its not knowing, and for its eye-shutting and ear-stopping, for its avoiding and forgetting. It counts itself well rid of the man in sackcloth. And herein lies one of its crowning mistakes. Herein lies one of the stupendous follies of the worldly-wise. My friends, we need this man in sackcloth. There is a holy, tender something that is called ‘sympathy.’ We do

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not learn the meaning of this word all at once. We can only learn it in the school where the sick and the lame and the blind and the needy are our teachers. Go to the man who has closed his gates against other men in their suffering—who has found a place at his table only for the singers and the players on instruments, the merchants and scholars, the gain-bringers and the laughter-makers—and ask him what sympathy means. He cannot tell you. It is not in his vocabulary. He can speak of gaiety and merchandise and learning; but sympathy is beyond him. It was the man in sackcloth who could have taught him that. And it is this same man in its midst who through all the ages has been doing more than the world has ever understood to keep the heart of the race tender and unselfish. Close the gate of your life against him; live day by day purposely forgetful of all the sad things about you; refuse to bear on your heart some part of the weight of world-pain, and you are excluding from your life one of Heaven's most ennobling ministries. Through the pain of them that suffer God comes into the lives of them that be whole.

'We that are strong' need the weak, if our strength is not to make us ungrateful and impious. Shut the man in sackcloth out of your presence, and very soon purple and fine linen will not be good enough for

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you. Forget the lonely, suffering lives with their destiny of pain, and soon you will be forgetting to thank God for a body that is at any rate not always a burden. Turn away your eyes from beholding the mists of suffering in which your brother is walking, and you will soon find fault with the cloudless sky above your path.

Look at the text again—the second one, Paul's text. Read the beginning and the end. 'We that are strong ought . . . not to please ourselves.' But that is just what strength is prone to do. And what is to hinder it? It steps forth to go just where it will, and to do just what it will. It is full of its vital energies and its self-approved plans for pleasuring and conquering. But that is not the way in which the strong life is to grow stronger. That is not finding the sacramental meaning of strength. And so between the strong man and his self-pleasing, God puts the infirmities of the weak, and bids him bear them.

This central phrase of the text is also the central fact in the salvation of the strong. 'Bear the infirmities of the weak.' It is not for nought that we worship a God touched with the feeling of our infirmities. It may be He were less than God if He knew no communion with the suffering of His children. And if we pass not into that same com-

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munion, we are less than men—as God makes them. And if we are to admit the world's pain into our hearts we must first admit the world's Saviour. When once the bleeding feet of Christ have crossed the threshold of a human heart, all wounded feet may cross that threshold too. When once the Man of Sorrows has passed beneath the portal of a human life, thereafter no sad lives are turned away unhelped. When once Jesus has speech with a man in the innermost place of his heart, that man has a new ideal of gain, of pleasure, and of good, for he has heard the truth that Ugo Bassi phrases for us in the great deathless words :

Measure thy life by loss instead of gain ;
Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth ;
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice ;
And whoso suffers most hath most to give.

VI

The Heart and the Highway

Set thine heart toward the highway.—JER. xxxi. 21.

I WANT this text to speak to many hearts to-night, and especially do I want it to speak to young hearts. Many of you here are young enough to feel more keenly than you will ever feel hereafter the spell of the untouched, the untrodden, undiscovered. The fashion of the years to be is beginning to take shape in your mind, and you have your dreams of how life will be moulded in the passing, and of how life will appear to you when the larger measure of it shall have become a retrospect. More than one vision is before your eyes, and more than one voice is calling to your hearts. There is the vision of the things to be enjoyed, and the soft plea of pleasure. There is the vision of the things to be worked for and fought for and waited for, and the loud, clear call ringing down from the seats of honour and the high places of gain. There is the sweet, vague vision born of life's essential hopefulness; there is the inarticulate murmur of unnumbered possibilities falling on the inward ear

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like the clamour of a distant crowd. I am not going to warn you against the vision and the voice. I should as soon think of warning you against the quick play of the blood in your veins, or the warm pulse of the spring-tide. These things that fill your eyes with the light of many beauteous and satisfying morrows, and set your hearts beating to the tuneful lilt of life's great marching song, are not a delusion. They are born of the life within you, and that is born of the God above you. They are your rightful heritage, of which no man shall dispossess you. I say no man—I care not who he be nor how he come to you. If he come in the sacred name of religion (as, alas, some have come!) and bid you remember that life is a dreary wilderness and that there is no room for such untutored hopefulness as yours, then bid him begone—bid him find a theology that does not blot out the glorious sunshine of heaven with a drizzling pessimism. I say, I will not warn you against the vision and the voice. I want you to believe in them, and follow them right through to the end.

But I have a warning for you. It is this: beware lest you never compass youth's best desire, and never justify its faith. There is before you a life more beautiful than your best dreaming, and the story of your morrows will be more rich and satisfying than anything you have imagined and desired—if you take

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the right road. You have seen how that there are many sordid and dishonoured and joyless lives lived, and you have said to yourself, 'I shall never come to that.' But you will come to that if you take the road that these miserable people have taken. They are the people who have left the highway, who have tried to find an easier path—or a shorter one—to their hearts' desire. And if you leave the highway, you will never find one ray of the gladness that now brightens your prospect, you will never leave the record of one of your heart's great thoughts written in the lives of men, and the tale of your years will not be worth the telling. 'Set thine heart toward the highway.'

Where is the highway? What does it mean? and whither does it lead?

The answer to that threefold question is found in the first lesson that we read together just now. You remember we read the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah. The prophet, who had clear, far-sighted vision of a renewed world—a world in which blind eyes should be opened to see heavenly beauty, and deaf ears should be unstopped to hear God's music; a world in which lame feet should be made strong to travel Godward, and dumb tongues should be loosed in praise of the Eternal Father,—I say the prophet, who saw these things touching the world delivered from its worst and led unto God's best by the redemption that is in

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Jesus Christ, said : ' And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness ; the unclean shall not pass over it, the wayfaring men shall not go astray therein.' And concerning them that walk therein the prophet says : ' Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' It is the way of the clean heart and the right spirit, the way of obedience and faith and crystal hope ; and the end of that way is in the presence of God, where the flesh no longer lusteth against the spirit, and where the heart remembers its bitterness no more.

' Set thine heart toward the highway.' In the beginning life appears to men as something to be enjoyed. It is full of winsome, gay-coloured anticipation. It lies before them bright with the promise of manifold pleasure. An instinctive desire for happiness is one of the primary possessions of the heart. We start out with the rooted idea that we ought to be happy. The heart desires gladness as the eyes desire light. And in our earliest years the heart is satisfied of its desire, and gladness is ours for the taking.

O my life, have we not had seasons
That only said, Live and rejoice,
That asked not for causes and reasons,
But made us all feeling and voice,

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When we went out with the winds in their blowing,
When nature and we were peers,
And we seemed to share in the flowing
Of the inexhaustible years.

But every man comes to a point where he has to make a choice between the thing that is merely pleasurable and the thing that is wholly right—where he cannot satisfy his desire for enjoyment without at the same time sacrificing his sense of duty. He comes face to face with that great choice that all before him have had to make, between the plea of conscience and the plea of comfort, between the highway and the by-path. Before him stretches the long and dusty road, uninviting and apparently endless ; and lo ! upon his right hand or his left there lies a way that offers a soft green carpet for the feet and a canopy of shade overhead, and which appears to lead more directly to the things that are delightful and desirable. It is hard for him to believe that that beautiful way leads into the malarial region of sin, where the fever of passion burns the strength out of a man's soul and the only guiding light when the shadows fall is the trembling will-o'-the-wisp of a spent desire.

Well is it with him who in such a case hears this word in his ear, ' And a highway shall be there '—cutting straight and true across the winding ways of the world, leaving its stained pleasures, its fascinating

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lusts, and its gaudy shame behind—I say, well for him who looks straight ahead and refuses to be beguiled. My friends, there are tens of thousands of people who are wandering in these by-paths to-night, fevered, deluded, dishonoured, and unsatisfied : who know that the most vain and foolish and disastrous thing they ever did was to turn aside from the highway of reverence and faith and prayer and clean living in search of pleasure. They found a brief delight and a lasting shame. Young people, I beseech you never to allow yourselves to be allured into taking one of these easy, feasible, fatal short cuts to pleasure. Keep the highway. Keep it in your reading. Do not open one of those popular novels that flaunt their shameless realism to-day and call it art—perhaps it is—black art ; and if you should find that a book you are reading says a light word about sin, shut it up and never read another word that that man or woman has written. Keep it in your sport and pastimes and amusements. Have nothing to do with the unsound excitement and dishonest gain of gambling ; avoid everything that is included in that word ‘questionable.’ Keep it in your friendships. Have no dealings with any one whom you know to be living a crooked and unwholesome life ; saving such dealings as can honestly be called efforts at redemption—and in those efforts commit your soul and his to God in heaven. Let

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the whole weight of your influence tell in favour of whatsoever things are pure. In your pursuit of the gladness of life ' Set your heart toward the highway.' There amid its dust and weariness, God shall give you a song to sing and a joy to find, and the end of that way is before the Gates of the Eternal City, where sorrow and sighing enter not.

But pleasure-seeking is not the only thing that leads men astray. They go astray in their quest of success. Perhaps the keenest temptation to travel in by-paths comes to men in their bread-winning and their gain-getting. We live in a world where many are honest just as far as honesty seems to serve their purpose—and sometimes that is not very far ; a world where cheating is counted one of the fine arts, and where a great many people lie and swindle their way to a success that scorches their souls. There are thousands of opportunities for deceit and fraud and unfair advantage ; and amid them all it must seem to a man at times that doing right puts him at a positive disadvantage, and that scrupulous honour is incompatible with earthly interests. Many of you know the insistence and subtlety of this temptation as I do not know it in the work-a-day world ; and I (and every other minister of the gospel) know it as you do not in the study and the pulpit. But this much I know—

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and this much I would have you know also—the Book says, ‘And an highway shall be there,’ there amid the toil and traffic of the world, there amid the strife for possession or position, running right through the heart of the world’s commerce and its social life ; and it shall be called the way of holiness—the way of true speech and honest dealing, the way of a good conscience and an unselfish heart, the way of the unworldly.

My friends, in your office, in your business house, in your workshop, in your social circle, set your heart toward the highway. Make up your mind to be absolutely honest, and leave it to the God above you whether or no you grow rich as men count wealth. Pay the full price of truth and unselfishness every day, and let it be enough to know that Heaven knows you have paid it. Do not turn aside one step from the King’s highway, either to seek a favour or win a tasty morsel of congratulation ; and the King Himself shall reward you, for the Book saith, ‘A good man shall obtain favour of the Lord.’

I know full well that all this is more easily talked of than accomplished. The highway is often wearisome and difficult to tread. The travellers thereon are sometimes sun-scorched and dust-laden, sometimes wrapped in cold mists and pitiless rain. It has never been an easy road, but it has ever been a safe

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one. And remember whither it leads: 'they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' He who bravely and patiently takes this way shall suffer for the hour that he may hereafter be glad with an eternal gladness. Everlasting joy shall be upon his head, and the song of the morning land shall be in his heart for ever.

Some of you, perhaps, have got off this highway, and some of you were never on it. How can you get on to it? There is only one way. It is this: 'Set thine heart.' This is a thing that concerns your heart. Do not say, 'I will set my feet toward the way of holiness.' The feet always go where the heart sends them. 'But,' you say, 'I cannot set my heart toward the highway. I have learned to love the by-ways.' I am glad you have said that. That is just what I wanted you to say. Heaven is glad you have said that. If you had said, 'Oh, I can set my heart toward the highway whenever I make up my mind to do so; I can turn all the desire of my life unto the way of godliness anytime,' I should have been afraid you would never come back at all. But if you know you cannot manage that wilful, sin-loving heart of yours, then you can find the way of life just now. It is to such as you that these grand words about the highway leading to the Eternal City were spoken.

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Once more let me read you the word of the prophet. Listen. ‘Strengthen ye the weak hands, say unto them that are of a fearful heart, your God will come and save you.’ Weak hands, fearful heart. Why, I tell you again, this message about the highway and the returning and the everlasting joy was written specially for you. You want to get on to the Highway—the way of purity and unselfishness and faith and truth—and you know you cannot get there by yourself. Jesus Christ came into the world to lead men into the way of holiness. He is the way. Give Him that unruly heart of yours. He will set and keep the desire of your life in the way of righteousness—the way that lies straight through the moil of the world into the City of the Great King.

VII

The Well-side and the World

This is indeed the Saviour of the world.—JOHN iv. 42.

THIS confession marks the tremendous climax of one of the most unrelated and quiet incidents in the life of Jesus. Two days before it was made, Jesus, weary with His journey from Judæa into Galilee, sat to rest Himself in the shadow of the trees that grew by Jacob's Well, hard by the little Samaritan town of Sychar. Thither a woman, who was living a life of shame, came to draw water. As she rested her heavy stone water-jar on the broad coping of the well, and maybe stood for a few moments looking down the long road, with that abstracted gaze in which the eyes see nothing, because the mind is so busy with some thoughts of yesterday or of to-morrow, Jesus spoke to her. Just a request for a drink of water, but it served to lead on to other things. Soon the woman was listening to words about herself, mercilessly true and yet unutterably tender; and other words, which, for all

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that she could but dimly feel their meaning, must have had both then and afterwards a wondrous music for her soul. For the Stranger at the well spoke of a living water, something that could quench the thirst of a sin-parched life, that had missed the innocence of girlhood, the pure honour of womanhood, the sanctity of home and the peace of an unshamed spirit. To this woman, for whom the shrine of human love was desecrated, for whom life knew no precious altar-fire, no safeguarded reverence, He spoke of a place of worship that was every place, a way of worship that the feet need never leave, an hour at hand when this shamed and irreverent world should find itself for ever in the shadow of an unseen temple always standing upon holy ground.

Then that woman of Sychar went back to her friends, and St. John in a sentence draws for us a picture, the wonder of which we cannot in this day properly feel, of a company of Samaritans gathered round the Jewish Stranger still resting by the well, and pleading that He would abide in the little town and speak again those words of wonder and of light. For two days Jesus stayed with them, and ere He left them some were saying, 'This is indeed the Saviour of the world.'

It may be granted that such a confession did not mean to them what it must mean to us. Their sense

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of the world was extremely limited, their use of the word 'Saviour' perhaps clouded with many an earth-born thought. But in their way, as far as might be, they had felt in the presence of Him who had spoken to the woman of shame, a power that counted for something, perhaps for everything, among all men everywhere. And surely with the confession of Christ as the Saviour of one human soul is, in some sense, bound up a confession of Christ as the Saviour of the world. We have not understood Jesus at the well of Sychar, we have not seen Him as He would have us see Him, nor trusted Him as He would have us trust Him, until in the broader light and wider human outlook of our day we have joined the Samaritans in their tremendous confession and conviction. 'We know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.' And the truth I want to emphasize is that we can only truly feel that conviction and make that confession by grace of a personal experience of the love and power of Jesus Christ.

In the history of Evangelical teaching I think it will be found that the world-significance of Christ has been assumed in the interests of individual salvation. Take, for instance, a very frequent use of that sublime passage, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have ever-

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lasting life.' How often have those vast words, 'the world' and 'whosoever,' been dwelt upon and emphasized for the comfort and help of some trembling sinner! Far be it from me to suggest that this way of handling the great passage just quoted is a mistaken one. There is a certain logic in the situation which is of use to some types of mind. And there is something else, too, subtle and inexplicable. There are times in life when we can believe for others what we cannot believe for ourselves. A man may find himself in a patch of darkness from which he can still see all others in happy light. A man may despair of himself, and yet think the world's hope a perfectly sane affair. And it may be that in the light of a million hopes, a man may see to grasp his own. A possibility may have to be as wide as the world before a man can find room in it for his own little life. So let us go on flashing the widest promises of God in the eyes of the man who cannot rise to one poor hope for his own soul. Let us unroll the great scroll of the heavenly kingdom, the kingdom of mercy and of peace, wherein a man for the trembling of his hand can scarce inscribe his name—I say let us unroll it until he sees its myriad inscriptions. Yes, and the blank white spaces, for myriads more.

But let us not think that in so doing we are true to

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the profoundest spiritual order. Let us not imagine for one moment that the true significance of Christ as the Saviour of the world can ever precede the true realization of Christ as the Saviour of our own soul. To have had a glimpse of Christ as of one able to meet the needs of all men, and to have used that brief vision as one means of gaining personal assurance that He can meet our own need, is not to have seen the Saviour of the world as for the world's abiding sake we need to behold Him. A man may in one brief passage of experience cling to the 'whosoever'; and aided by the lift of that strong, all-availing word he may be helped to rise to the faith that reveals to him his own place in the covenant of grace: and he may thereafter live a spiritual life maimed and narrowed, or at any rate self-centred and undeveloped, a life in which that wide word 'whosoever,' that gave him its splendid aid, loses nearly all its force. It gave him a moment's help, but it has not laid upon him a life-long and world-wide imperative. And even in the first instance, in the matter of a man's act of faith, I think it is safe to say that for no man has that act of faith ever been based to any serious extent upon his conception of Christ's ability to save the whole world.

All that is most typical and most profound and essential in personal salvation is found in the

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incident at Sychar's well. The woman of Samaria took back to her friends a picture of a 'man who told me all things that ever I did.' Christ had searched her heart, He had judged her life. Everything she had ever done had suddenly, in some dim way, become a matter between Him and herself. As it was with her, so doubtless it was with the others to whom Jesus spoke in that little town. And it was out of a hundred heart-searchings, out of many a revived memory of wrong done, many an awakened or renewed yearning after the pure good of life ; yes, and out of a personal faith in that divine Stranger who had so graciously consented to tarry with them, that the confession at last came, 'This is indeed the Saviour of the world.' That is the true and inevitable order of divine revelation and of spiritual conviction.

And now let us see what this conclusion has to say to us with regard to the matter that is in our thought to-day—the great question of the salvation of the world. The obvious truth is surely this. However true it may be that some sense of the sufficiency of Christ to meet the world's need helps us to find in Him the answer to our own need, it is more profoundly true that it is only through a deep experience of the power of Christ in our own life that we can realize Him as the supreme power in

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the world's life. The true missionary passion must have a supremely personal and experimental source. Many efforts are made nowadays to broaden our religious sympathies, our sense of spiritual obligation, by quickening our imagination. Pictures of the heathen world are spread before our eyes. Missionary publications, conferences, exhibitions, are pressed into this service. And there is no doubt that they all serve a good purpose, do really, though only in a very limited way, help to secure the ends for which they are used. As secondary aids to the missionary cause they are splendid; but in any primary sense they are useless. To see Christ as the Saviour of the world we do not need first of all to see Christ and the world. We need to see Christ each for himself. The missionary vision and the missionary spirit are born at Sychar's well. Without awkward reference, without self-conscious emphasis, Jesus in His divine simplicity crossed the barriers of sex and of nationality. The woman wondered that a Jew should speak to her. The disciples wondered that Christ should be speaking with a woman. Jesus was not addressing a woman as such, nor a Samaritan as such. He spoke to a needy, sinful, human soul. He addressed Himself to all in His listener's life that transcended distinctions and divisions.

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And it is to that in us that Jesus always speaks. The deepest needs of life are its common needs, its transcendent needs. To come to know that Christ can fill your life is to come to know that He can fill all life. So then, all failure to enter into the widest spirit and purpose of the gospel is essentially a personal failure. Our vision of Christ's province is determined by our experience of Christ's power. No man can see more of Christ's territory than he has felt of Christ's kingship. While yet the words Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria were trembling in the air, He said to His disciples, 'Lift up your eyes, look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest.' He had seen in that woman's sad eyes the need and hunger and blindness of all the world. He had conversed in those brief moments at the well with all humanity. And soon He set that little town of Sychar, with its national and political obscurity and limitations, talking, not of the Saviour of Sychar or Samaria, but of 'the Saviour of the world.' An intense and intimate experience of the love and grace of Jesus Christ is the living core of all missionary passion, and the only sufficient and abiding inspiration of all missionary effort.

When we speak, as we sometimes do, of people becoming narrow and selfish in their religion, we

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use loose phrases. In the final truth of things we contradict ourselves. If in our religious life we are narrow, it is not by reason of what we believe ; it is by reason of what we do not believe. Selfishness can never be woven into or induced from the religion of Jesus Christ. In as far as we are selfish we are irreligious. It is of our blindness, our unresponsiveness, our latent earthliness, that selfish thoughts and attitudes are born. I think sometimes we confuse between intensity and true depth. A man may be intensely religious, and yet be quite out of touch with a great deal that religion stands for. But he cannot be thus out of touch with the true ranges and obligations and issues of the Christian life and at the same time deeply religious. In this matter, at least, depth and breadth are two words for the same thing. Jesus appeals to that in us that makes us one with our kind. He wakens from our hearts a cry for mercy and for help that is our own soul's utterance as nothing else has ever been or could ever be. And we know it is so ; we feel it is so. And yet we feel that life's profoundest plea is an echo. When I have uttered my supreme request, I am in the world's great place of prayer. I am alone with the human race in its quest after God. To be alone with Christ is to be in touch with all men.

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And if this is so, then surely the missionary cause assumes a spiritual meaning, a religious centrality, beyond that which we are, I fear, in the habit of giving to it. It can never be understood by studying black patches on a missionary map. It can never be brought home to us either by the most stirring addresses or the most appalling statistics. It can never be added externally to our religious interests, or attached mechanically to our religious enterprises. It can never be served in the Church's leisure, nor endowed with the Church's surplus. It is an aspect of the catholic and apostolic faith. It is part of the one and indivisible burden of Christian obligation and service. And allowing for the secondary and adventitious help that is afforded us in many ways to-day towards knowing and meeting the spiritual need of mankind everywhere, the secret both of that knowledge and of that power is revealed to us in our personal communion with Him who searched and enlightened a woman's soul at Sychar's well-side.

VIII

The Lesson of an Interruption

Master, speak to my brother.—LUKE xii. 13.

JESUS was preaching to a large crowd ; we know there was one man in that crowd, evidently not far from the preacher, upon whom the sermon was being wasted. He was absorbed in his own affairs. He was thinking about something else. It was a bit of property. Some while back his father had died ; but it was not grief for the dead that clouded his brow and caused that almost sinister tightening of the lips. He was not thinking of the dead, but of the living. He was not bearing a grief : he was nursing a grievance. On the very day of his father's burial he had quarrelled with his brother about the little bit of property. On the evening of that one day in their two lives when one might have thought their hearts would have been soft within them, when a common sorrow and a common loneliness might have drawn them closer together, when they might have proved the words that had so

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often fallen on their ears as they had stood side by side in the synagogue and heard the scripture, 'A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity,'—I say in that hour so meet for kindness and reconciliation and the deepening of their heart's sympathy, they stood in hot and bitter dispute about a little bit of property; and the sun went down on their wrath.

Things were no better next day. They rarely are. There are moments in all our lives when circumstances conspire to make for us a simple opportunity of putting things right. I will not stay to name the things. They are the things that are wrong. You know. There are moments when penitence, and confession, and generous forbearance, and the beginning of some better way are not far to seek. And if we seek them not in the evening when they are near, we may look in vain for them on the morrow's morn. A mood is sometimes the gateway of a principle.

And now, to return to our story, one of these brothers found himself in a crowd gathered round the great Teacher. And the words of Him who spake as never man spake passed into the ears of this anger-nursing fool like the inarticulate babble of a brook. Suddenly some movement of the man next to him, or some new inflexion in that perfect

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voice, called back his wandering thoughts. What had the Rabbi been saying? Something about God caring for sparrows and numbering the hairs of a man's head. If there was such a providence as this he might call it to his aid. At any rate He who proclaimed it did so with a strangely convincing authority. Here was an opportunity perhaps of settling the one thing his strife-ridden mind could think about; and so he broke the gnawing, sordid silence of his spirit and blurted out this brief appeal, 'Master, speak to my brother.' The Master had been speaking to *him*. He had been telling him how that there was a great revelation coming by-and-by, when a secret would be a secret no longer, when the whole truth would be manifest, and every hidden way of righteousness or wrong-doing would be known. He had spoken of life and death and the eternal soul. He had set before the people the blessedness of faith confessed, and the curse of faith denied. He had said the most terrible words—inward, searching, divine words—about sin that were ever uttered, or could be. And one man missed the point of it all, and the power of it all, and the personal application of it all, because he was fuming and fretting over two cottages and a bit of pasture land.

It takes but little to deafen our ears to heavenly

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messages and harden our hearts against the suasions of the good Spirit. It takes but little to blind us to the wider view and the truer view. Look at this man who missed heaven's mercy through brooding over earth's injustice, and read a lesson to your own heart. Think whether you have not given abundant entrance to the lower things whilst the higher have not been permitted even to linger on the threshold. We brood over some passing injustice, or that which we deem to be such. We let our neighbour's unfairness eat into our hearts, as doth a canker. We become full of bitterness concerning some challenged right in the world of things. And we shut out of our hearts the tender and satisfying word of our God concerning a possession on which no man can lay thievish fingers, a divine right of which no man can dispossess us, 'an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.'

To say the least of it, this man's request showed that he was making the tragic mistake of the worldling. There he stood, face to face with the Son of Man, in the presence of things essential and eternal, with great words about light and sin and judgement and eternity falling on his ears. And the harvest of that one priceless hour was unreaped by him. Heaven was offered to him, and he swept the offer

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aside, being intent on a bit of land and a tenement or two.

Have you never done just such a thing as this? Whenever you come into a church to worship God, you are in the presence of those things that are passionless and satisfying and abiding. You are in the presence of all your life's real needs and all your God's real grace. Do you always realize it? You sit there in your pews seeming to listen to the message that God has for your soul. But if you should do what this man did—suddenly speak out the inner and dominant thought of your heart, would it be, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' 'God be pitiful to me, a sorrowing one,' 'God satisfy this hungry soul of mine with bread from heaven'; or would it be this: 'Master, speak to *my brother*, that he divide the inheritance with me'? My friends, beware of coming to the house of God and giving yourself up to your grievances, and thinking your own little, embittering, soul-starving thoughts, whilst the timeless word of God goes past your ears as if it were not spoken.

But you ask, 'Can we not bring into the Temple of God the wrongs we suffer at the hands of other people? Can we not lay at the feet of God, just and merciful, things relating to the earthly inheritance? Can we not speak to Him of those things

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that make our hearts burn, and sometimes set our tongues on fire?' Most certainly we can. But we must be prepared to look at things as God only can show them to us. Listen to this. 'Lord, speak to my brother. Deal with the man who has insulted me, wronged me, cheated me.' That was the plea. Now hear the answer: 'Beware of covetousness.' This man had to learn that he was beginning at the wrong end of things. This is the only way to begin: this is the spirit in which to lay life's wrongs at the feet of the eternal righteousness.

'Lord, speak to me.' That is, I think, what Christ teaches us in His answer to this seeker of an earthly inheritance. 'Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.' And then Jesus clinched His reply, and drove it home with the story of a man whose only trouble in the matter of the earthly inheritance was the problem of storage, and who died a spiritual bankrupt. It was as if Christ had said, as He read the story of that angered and greedy spirit, 'Man, my word is not to your brother: it is to you. Beware of covetousness. You are afraid of losing some property: but the thing you really stand to lose this day with your hate and your greed is your own soul. You are giving all the thought of your life

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to something that cannot satisfy you if you get it. Moreover, look into your own heart and confess yourself full of greed. Confess that if you could get the whole inheritance to-morrow and oust your brother, you would do it. It will take vastly more than getting that field to put your life right.' Thus to a narrow and twisted and unhallowed passion that was distorting this man's life Jesus applied a calm, eternal principle. He let in upon the lurid thought of this man's mind the calm and perfect light of truth and love.

And that is just what He is ever seeking to do for you and me. Whenever we bring our wrongs to Christ, His first word is always straight to our own heart. 'Beware of covetousness.' We need not confine ourselves to any one meaning of the word: though doubtless many need the warning literally as Christ uttered it. The reading of a will has not seldom been the death-warrant of friendships and the birthday of hatred. Whether it is the rich man's thousands or the poor man's table and chairs, there is a devil in property that enters easily into the covetous heart.

But some who may be fairly sound in respect of the material properties of life may be unsound concerning its intangible possessions—the inheritance of rank and power and the like. It boots little that

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we have due regard for another man's goods and chattels if we demand of him in any form concessions that are morally unauthorized and unreasonable. In every possible aspect of the human relationship beware of covetousness. Beware of demanding more than is due, and offering less than is due. Begin with yourself. Is all the wrong on the other side? Is all the offence of the other man's making? What about that proud and unforgiving and vindictive spirit you are feeding on every day? Maybe there are some here this evening who are nursing a grievance. You are at war with one who has what you once thought would be yours. Or you have quarrelled over some trifling matter with one who was once your dear friend; there is, shall we say, a strained relationship between you and some member of your own family, or between you and some of that larger family circle that is called the human brotherhood. You can, we will admit, make a good case out for yourself. That is always a perilously easy task. But have you ever tried to make a case out against yourself? Have you nothing to confess, to be sorry for? Have you not vowed you will not take a step towards a reconciliation? 'He will have to come to me—all the way.' What do you think Jesus would say to a man who lets some plausible but selfish consideration outweigh the

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gaining of his brother and the law of love? ‘Lord, speak to me. Take the pride and enmity out of my heart. Help me to deal with this trouble about the inheritance, this misunderstanding, this offence, this trespass on my rights, with the humble and blameless charity of Jesus Christ.’ A prayer like that would settle most wrongs between one life and another. Let two be of that spirit, and the quarrel is dead.

We need also the far view and the deep view of life that Jesus pressed home to the heart of this covetous life. ‘A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.’ I think that everything that is wrong between one life and another might, if we were wise enough, be traced to a fault in our ideal. We need to be ever judging our own conception of life in the light of these starry words of Jesus. It was as if He said to this man, ‘Measure this wrong of yours by the measure of heaven. Take it out of the tiny room of your life, and look at it under the sweep of the stars. Weigh it in the balances of eternity.’ My friends, justice may teach us what are our rights; but only love can teach us how to seek them.

And Christ lived and died to show us what love is, and to set it in our hearts; that we may come to know that the highest right of life is the right

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to be patient and merciful, the right to forgive, the right to rule our lives by that availing and pitiful wisdom that is ever justified of her children—wisdom that is granted to such as find their way through the living Christ into some knowledge of a God whose purpose is infinite justice, and whose heart is infinite love.

IX

The Waste of the Ointment

Why was this waste of the ointment made?—MARK xiv. 4.

WHENEVER we come near to the beautiful in life, we are judged by it. We are put on trial concerning our soul's purity and work, and acquitted or condemned according as we are found able or unable to understand and appreciate. We never know what day may be a judgement day for the soul. We never know when we shall be called to give account of our stewardship of life's hidden things. God has so many ways of trying us, that it may stand revealed what manner of men we be. And one of those ways is by the vision beautiful. Very simply, very suddenly, amid the dust and monotony of the workaday world, the veil is drawn aside from the prosaism and seeming commonplace-ness of existence, and the beautiful, pure, holy things that are always present are made manifest. And whenever that is so, the dividing-line goes forth between them that see and them that see not—between them

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that gather the true significance of life and them that miss it.

Such a moment of judgement occurred in the house of Simon the leper at Bethany, when the alabaster vase was broken, and its rich perfume filled the room. Though perhaps none of them realized it, all who were present that day at that sacrament of simple devotion had to give account of themselves. That beautiful incident judged them all. And it declared some of them to be of the earth earthy. They were condemned for their blindness, for the hardness of their hearts, for their inability to understand.

I know there is a misunderstanding that is venial. There is a failure of the understanding on which Heaven looks very leniently. Every man cannot follow close reasoning. Some of us very soon lose our way in the subtle mazes of thought. To an untrained mind English may be as incomprehensible as Sanscrit. And in that perfect light where God dwells, and where the true reckonings of life are kept, it will not go hardly with any one of us that sometimes our minds, dimly lighted as they are, and peopled with mists and shadows of thought, failed to follow arguments or missed the meaning wrapped in many words. But there are other powers of appreciation than those attaching to keen intellectual acumen. There is a world where the heart sees and judges.

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There is a faculty of appreciation founded on our affections—our human sympathies, and all the simple elemental powers of the spirit. In the beautiful world of unselfishness and sacrifice and faith and brotherly service, not to understand is a sin, blindness is criminal. It may be easily forgiven a man that he stumbled over words—that the book-writers and the sermon-makers sometimes left him a little perplexed. But the best things of life lie beyond words. The deepest and most precious meanings of life are not folded in learned pages. Our instincts, our intentions, our deep unreasoning yet often eminently reasonable likes and dislikes—it is to these things God makes His appeal, and by these we are judged.

Look at the broken vase and the outpoured spikenard, and see where the real judgements of life are recorded for us all. We are tested not by the vast, the intricate, the problematic, not by the creed whose verbal limits have been fixed by learned counsils, but day by day in all the simple, faithful, selfless things that life reveals unto us. There are things that only the good and the honest and the generous and the sincere can appreciate—things that are perceived not by the clever-headed but by the clean-hearted ; and it is when in the path of our life we meet these things that we have settled for us the

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question of our place and worth in the spiritual kin.

Such a moment of judgement, I say, came to all in Simon's house at Bethany. A sweet and beautiful deed was wrought before their eyes. They were brought to the judgement bar of sympathy, and for some of them the verdict was anything but favourable. For we read, 'there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, "Why was this waste of the ointment made?"' This waste! The man who said that knew nothing of the higher usefulness. Utility is a wider word than ever the world guesses. Nothing counts for quite as much as the thing that in the world's judgement counts for nothing. There is nothing more practical and serviceable than that which men so often dismiss as mere sentiment. The adverse criticisms passed on life are often the outcome of the critics' ignorance—the judgements of the blind. There have always been some in the world who have lost sight of life at those points where it is most worth seeing—who have esteemed most lightly its precious things. 'This waste of the ointment.' That is an economy of selfishness. That is the thrift of which a man may well be ashamed. That is the poor, narrow soul that cannot understand giving, that counts all the outpouring of life as so much waste.

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This is the question that faces us all day after day as we go out to the great service—as we pass by the path of friendship and neighbourhood, and seek to take our place among them who would make this world a better world. Why this waste? That is one of the most awful questions that the devil has to ask. That is one of the most depressing queries in the catechism of unbelief! That is materialism in the interrogative mood. That is an attempt to cast the shadow of vanity and futility over the most real and lasting thing in all the world—a soul's unselfishness, the service of love. It is a question that you cannot answer unless you first clearly realize that it ought never to have been asked. Why was this waste of the ointment made? The answer is this. The ointment has not been wasted. It has served a high and beautiful purpose. It has found a place in the deathless service of selflessness. The alabaster vase is broken and empty, and by-and-by the last lingering perfume of the nard will have been lost in the surrounding air; but the life that gave and the life that received are for ever richer, and that empty vessel is the outward and visible sign of one of those simple gifts of sympathy and devotion whereby the heart of the world is kept tender and warm.

Why this waste? That is a question that comes to men and women in the simplest relationship of family

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and social life, until some of them come to think that the alabaster vase of life's best sympathy is too precious a thing to be broken daily. If the woman had come to Christ when He was fresh from the rough usage and blasphemous scorn of the Jews, or when in bitter heart-breaking loneliness He wrestled for the souls of those by whom He was rejected, some might have better understood the gift. But she came when He was sitting at meat among His disciples and friends. She met Him on the quiet levels of life. She anointed Him in one of life's seemingly commonplace hours. Perhaps some of us are saving up that alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very costly. It is too precious to be broken when we are sitting at meat. Its perfume is too rich and rare to be lost on the dusty air of the street. We say we will reserve it for some greater occasion—some crowning sorrow, some tragic hour. It would be wasted to-day. That is a two-fold delusion—a double mistake. Sympathy is never wasted. Even if it is not accepted by those to whom it is offered, yet the giver lives a larger and a deeper life for his gift.

And there is a greater demand for sympathy in each day's life than any of us fully realize. There is a whole world of pain and need all about us and we know it not. Life is heavy with unrevealed tragedy, and the seeming silence is often tense with unuttered

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cries. The well-worn conventionalisms of our daily greetings fall from lips that could tell a bitter story if they chose. And in a world where life goes hard with us all in turn, I say that tenderness and consideration, and the grace of the soft answer, and the responsive, understanding spirit, and the loving will to help, are never out of place, and never wasted. And so I say by the larger life we ourselves might live, and by the simple human need that lies all about us—that lives with us in the home, that meets us on the pavement—it is a pitiable mistake to count the alabaster vase of the heart's true sympathy too precious a thing to be broken daily. Sympathy is a nard that is never wasted. It is an ointment that avails to heal wounds that will yield to no other treatment, and to ease pain that otherwise could not be borne.

But the work of all sympathy and courtesy and forbearance and sacrifice is not always apparent. Often it is not easily traced, sometimes it is unseen of them that do it. That is why the world speaks so lightly of it. The world says, 'I measure by effects, I judge by results.' Quite right, O world—if you can be sure you see effects and results. But the soul's best work lies beyond the range of its judgement. We are not capable of judging life at those points where scrutiny is least of all to be feared—we may even say

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most of all to be desired and welcomed. We want to tell—to be effective. We do not like to think that we are living in vain. We like to feel that our life is counting for something in the great human story. And sometimes to reassure ourselves, to comfort our hearts concerning this question, we look back and recall days that were flushed with a brief triumph or crowned with some tangible acknowledgement of our endeavours. But in that day, when each man shall see his life as it is, and judge it in the clear light of heaven, one cannot help thinking that the emphasis will not fall on hours that brought manifest reward, nor the choicest worth of living be found folded in the hours that seemed to spell success. The day will come when an empty alabaster vase, with the sweet odour of spikenard still clinging to it, will count for more than a laurel-wreath; when the hours of the soft heart will count for more than the hours of the masterful spirit; when the thing given will stand for more than the thing won; and when we shall find that we were never so near success as in those moments when we loved our neighbour as ourselves.

'This waste of the ointment.' The vanity of unselfishness, the futility of kindness. We have all heard a whisper of this. It is a subtle, trying, paralysing suggestion that every life has to face. It comes to us on the wings of our own weariness—

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comes to us when from the rostrum of the world we hear a more than usually eloquent sermon preached by ambition or the pride of life ; comes to us in the day when the soft answer fails to turn away wrath—when our most unselfish attitude is misinterpreted, or comes when we face the sneering rhetoric of cynicism. And we cannot hope to do our best, cannot hope to find the full meaning of good service, until we have learned to put this suggestion where it undoubtedly belongs—among the devil's own lies. That is where the Christ put it. ‘This waste of the ointment !’ Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of. That broken vase shall never be forgotten ; that odour of spikenard shall linger so long as the world endures. That is heaven’s verdict on earth’s unselfishness. That is God’s judgement passed on the simple, undistinguished service of love. That is the immortality of kindness.

X

The Quiet Heart

Let not your heart be troubled ; ye believe in God, believe also in Me.
—JOHN xiv. 1.

THERE are times in life that call for all the tenderness that is in us. Never, perhaps, is the demand greater than in the hour when the shadow of separation falls across the path. It is a shadow we all know. We have all walked in it. Life is ever teaching us the lesson of farewell—ever putting miles of land and sea between a mother and her boy, between friend and friend ; and preparing us for the hour when some soul we love passes into the shadowy dusk at the river's edge. And at these times the unutterable pathos of a world where they suffer most who love most comes down on our spirits.

It is to one of these tender passages in life—perhaps the most tender that history records—that these words we have just read together belong. Night had fallen with Oriental swiftness upon

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Jerusalem ; and there, in the guest-chamber of a friend's house, Jesus was partaking of the Passover Supper with His disciples. Not with all of them. Judas had gone on his mission of darkness. The shadow of some boding treachery had fallen on these men and chilled their hearts. 'One of you shall betray Me.' In the intense quiet that had followed those words, they had looked at one another and doubted one another ; they had searched their own hearts and almost doubted themselves. Only one of them had been free from doubt, and he had something worse—he knew. But he had gone ; and after his departure the cup of foreboding was filled to the brim by Jesus Himself. Quietly, but with an awful intensity of meaning, He told them that He too was going away—going where they could not follow Him then. Not by any dusty Syrian highway was He going from them.

Peter could not bear this impenetrable shadow of separation. He made a simple, blunt, sincere effort to get to the heart of this thing. 'Lord, whither goest Thou ?' So far Jesus had never gone a journey without warm-hearted Peter close behind Him. And Peter could not see why this journey should be an exception. 'O Peter, whither I go thou canst not follow Me now : thou art not ready for this journey yet. Thou shalt follow Me afterwards—when thou

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hast learned a little more and suffered a little more for My sake. What is that thou sayest? Thou wilt lay down thy life for Me? I tell thee ere another day dawns thou wilt deny Me with a threefold denial.' I think in the pause that followed that prophecy of the Master, those eleven men entered more deeply than ever before in their lives into the mystery of the troubled heart. They looked at the vacant place where Judas Iscariot had but lately reclined ; they looked at Peter, and said to themselves, 'This hour of darkness that is coming on us all is going to be too terrible for him.' They looked at their Master and Friend—they saw His place empty, and their cup of trouble was full. And then at the crowning-point of their distress these words broke the fear-laden silence : 'Let not your heart be troubled.'

My friends, have you ever thought that trouble is a mistake? Have you ever thought you would have been better, wiser, and happier if you had never sorrowed? If so, look at that little gathering of disciples, each with a shadow on his face and an ache in his heart. Hear the Master comforting them with words about God their Father, and the place of many mansions, and the ministry of the divine Spirit, and the efficacy of prayer; and know that trouble is a teacher, and pain a revelation, and that there is a theology of tears. The disciples never listened to

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Jesus as they listened that Passover evening, when a touch of pain had shaken their little world. And never before had He been able to say so much to them. Oh, the divine possibilities of the earthly impossible! It is not till we can do nothing that we find that God can do everything.

'Let not your heart be troubled.' Trouble is a thing of the heart. We do not learn that all at once; but having learned it, we have learned the first lesson in quietness. We begin by thinking that trouble is all around us, in the necessities, mysteries, and pains of our ever-varying situation. A period of ill-health, the shadow of uncertainty on all our prospects, the hour when some one we would have trusted with a life-and-death trust fails us, the day when we dig a grave as deep as our life,—when these things come we pass into a baptism of anxiety, grief, and helplessness.

'Let not your heart be troubled?' What is this thing that He says? I do not understand it. I cannot help myself when trouble comes. He speaks as if this question of trouble were one that I could deal with—and yet the sun will not shine at my bidding; the storm-wind will not be hushed at the call of my voice. Yes, my friend, He does so speak, and He means this thing He says to you. You cannot rule the storm; but that does not involve the sole alterna-

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tive that the storm must rule you. You cannot hush the tempest, but you can hide from it. I have read of a man who built his house upon a rock ; and the story says that the great flood and the screaming tempests came against that house to destroy it, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. God has not taught us how to rule tempests ; but He has taught us how to build houses that will defy these tempests. He has not given us the lordship of life's stressful weather, but He has given us the lordship of our hearts.

'Let not your heart be troubled ; ye believe in God, believe also in Me.' There was no word of explanation. There was no ray of light cast on that mystery of parting and waiting and suffering which was folding the disciples' lives. Jesus took them right out beyond the uncertainty, the mystery of the hour, and led them into the simple surety of eternal love. 'Ye believe in God—as all your Jewish ancestors believed in Him—add to that faith all the things I have shown you and taught you. Believe in God, as He has spoken to you with My lips, and dwelt with you in My fellowship with you, and loved you with My heart. You know I have dwelt with you and loved you. Do you know why? It is that you may know that God is love. It is that you may come to know that beyond the darkness of the hour and the

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loneliness of the years—alike in the starlight and in the storm—there is but one thing: the breath, the light, the end of being; and that thing is the love wherewith God loves you.'

Oh, my friends—and I speak particularly to you whose sorrow is most recent and most bitter—the first and the final deliverance from trouble is not by the path of explanation, it is by the path of faith. As Jesus dealt with those trembling disciples, so He deals with all trembling lives. He might have reasoned with them about the necessity for His going and the manner of it. He might have unfolded to them the ethics of the atonement. But He did not. He knew that there are hours in men's lives when the most faultless piece of reasoning is no good to them. They cannot grasp anything but their own pain. So He lifted the eyes of those disciples beyond their bewildering circumstance and bade them rest on the one thing that lay beyond the many things—the infinite simplicity that lay beyond their mortal confusion. Believe in God. God is love. The secret of the quiet heart has never been understanding—it has ever been faith in the God who understands. The word for to-morrow is knowledge; the word for to-day is trust. 'Ye shall know hereafter.' Nothing but faith in God can avail to keep us quiet till life emerges from the shadows of ignorance and pain,

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and finds the great explanation. We must see Him. We must have the vision of the heart.

No age, perhaps, ever trusted its eyes as this age does. For the last fifty years men's eyes have been very wide open and very keen, and they have seen a great deal. There has been just one serious drawback to this. Some think they have seen—or soon shall see—all. Some think that the secret of peace is in the vision of science. There is a tendency to approach every experience of life along the line of the intellect. Faith in some quarters is depreciated. But, however men may slight it, they learn soon or late that they cannot live without it. These scientists, with their delicate instruments and their subtle treatises can say a great many things to us, but they cannot say all we need to hear. During the last fifteen years I have read many of their books. I honour them, and the service they have wrought; but I have missed one note in them all—the note of comfort. There is one thing they cannot in all their wisdom say to us: 'Let not your heart be troubled.' They cannot say that. They can teach us to talk wisely, but they cannot help us to live quietly. They do not give any help in the day of a troubled heart. In that day I do not want to be reasoned with, I want to be comforted. I do not want learning, I want love. I do not want man, I want God. I do not want science,

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I want faith. I will say to this man with the microscope : ‘ My friend, if I looked for years through your beautiful instrument you could never show me this thing that my faith has shown me. Listen : “ Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them falls to the ground without your Father ? ” “ The hairs of your head are all numbered.” ’ That is the microscopy of faith. I will say to this man with the telescope : ‘ My heart’s vision can leave your instrument a long way behind. Listen : “ These are they which came out of great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple . . . They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more : neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.” ’ My friend, what is the good of talking to me about the interstellar spaces when the thing my heart needs is the Eternal Love of God in Jesus Christ ? All you can say to me is, ‘ Believe in the laws of life.’ I do believe in them ; and that creed is not enough. I must believe in the Lord of life.

There is another recipe for the troubled heart prepared and expounded by the worldling. He says,

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'Come with me, and we will go where there is the lilt of merry music and the twinkle of dancing feet. Once at the feast and you will forget your sadness.' We know how little this man's advice is worth. We have heard and maybe yielded to this plea for a little diversion ; and we know that a troubled heart cannot be sung and danced and fooled out of its grieving. There are some who are testing this counsel this very night, and this very night it is failing them. They have no appetite for the feast ; and through all the bright music there wails and sobs the chant of their inward grief. The world's music may get into your feet ; but only the music of heaven, of the divine promises, can get into a troubled heart. In this world of problem and passion, and fear and distress, where the shadow of separation veils from us much that once was ours and lies soft and silent upon all that we do now possess, there is but one way to the quiet heart. It lies, not in the wisdom that would know all, or in the folly that would forget all, but in the faith that trusts the love of God the Father in the face of Jesus Christ—the faith that leads a man, in all the trouble of his days, to shelter his soul in the promise, yea, and in the silence, of the Infinite Mercy.

'Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.'

XI

In Another Form

After that He appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.—MARK xvi. 12.

H E appeared unto them in another form—not another person. It was the same Christ and Lord. But there was some difference of manifestation. That is the plain truth coming to meet us out of the region of mystery where for us the final truth of things must ever dwell. After His resurrection Jesus was to His disciples Jesus—with a difference. He was the same, and yet not the same. There was something about Him that differentiated Him from the Christ of the Garden, and the hillside, and the country road, and the seashore. The disciples never doubted that He was the same Jesus with whom they had passed through the corn-fields, and traversed the Syrian highways, and voyaged on Gennesaret. But the human form which was soon to pass from their midst already seemed to be playing a lessening part in their recognition of their

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Lord. In a little while they should see Him no more—that is, as a man sees his fellow man. Soon the vision of the living and ever-present Christ was to be reserved wholly for the inward eye of every reverent and faithful soul. But it would appear that already, in anticipation of this new order of things, the old order was changing, and the outward form of the Master was already becoming less and less an essential medium for the revelation and recognition of His unchanging personality. This much may be gathered from the story of the days between the resurrection and the ascension.

The Magdalene, to whom Jesus appeared in Joseph's garden, in the clear sunlight of the Easter morning, failed to recognize Him. She, who would have said that she knew that face and form better than any other in all the world, took them to be the Arimathæan's gardener. Then He called her by her name, and that one word so tenderly spoken brought the flash of inward vision that told her she stood in the presence of her Lord. It was her heart that first recognized Him.

Recall for a moment another scene. Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, with Thomas and Nathanael of Cana and two other disciples—seven of them in all—were coming ashore after a night of fruitless toil on the waters of Tiberias. Jesus stood on the beach and

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asked them how they had fared, and gave them instructions to cast their net again ; and not one of the seven recognized Him until, as they hauled in the net and felt its straining meshes, and caught the silvery glimmer of scales beneath the water, one of them suddenly realized who it was at whose bidding they had cast their net. Probably there came to this man the memory of a scene not altogether unlike this nearly three years before, when after preaching from Simon's boat to a crowd upon the shore, the Master had bidden them put to sea and lower their net ; and whilst the wonder of the amazing result was filling their minds, had called them to their life-work and named them 'fishers of men.' But it is very significant that the man who first woke to the recollection of all this—and to the recognition of that quiet, noble figure on the shore—was John, the disciple who was bound most closely to the Master by the bonds of affection, and who had that faculty of intuition and perception that is the birthright of affectionate and sympathetic natures.

We will not follow the history any further just now. Suffice it to say that the story of the days between the resurrection and ascension tells us that, in the recognition of Jesus by those to whom He revealed Himself, the spiritual senses predominated over the physical, and the heart played an ever larger

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part in the work of perception. It is abundantly clear from the narrative that it was no apparitional and illusionary Christ that the disciples recognized ; but it is equally clear that they who had been wont to recognize their Master and Brother in precisely the same way as they recognized one another, now needed that their physical senses should be quickened and reinforced by the spiritual forces of memory, faith, and love.

And now, of all the things that might be learned from these strange and wondrous days when Jesus passed among His disciples—a figure so simply human, and yet so mysteriously divine, now obeying and now conquering the laws of time and space—let us learn this lesson. We must not think to find in the forms and manifestations of spiritual life that reality and finality which can only rightly be attributed to spiritual life itself. Form plays so large a part in our physical and material reckonings, judgement by appearance is so necessarily a part of our life in a world of appearances. But we have to learn that, even as the same Christ came to the Magdalene, to the disciples on Tiberias, and to the two who journeyed to Emmaus in forms in which they did not immediately recognize Him, so that spiritual life which Jesus revealed, and for which He stood, and ever stands, may take unto itself more than one form

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of manifestation as it makes its way into the heart of the world.

'He appeared in another form.' He is always doing that. Would that we were able always to find Him! Would that our faith were deep enough, would that our insight were keen enough, would that our love were catholic enough, to recognize Him in all the forms and fashions of His coming unto the children of men! For all of us whose religious experience is a reality, there is one form we recognize. We know Him as He has come to us. Let us not think that every man must know Him exactly as we do. Let us not think that just as He stands before our eyes, so must He also stand, line for line, before our neighbour's eyes. Let us never hold up before our brother's eyes our portrait of Christ, and say, 'That is He, and there is no other: when you see that you will see Him, and not till then.' Let us say to ourselves rather, 'That is my vision; but it may not be his.' Many a stumbling-block would be removed from the path of the seekers after Christ—and maybe many a misjudgement would be averted or corrected—if only we could come to see that the Christ of all true spiritual experience has more than one fashion of revealing Himself to men, and of imparting to them the treasures of His grace. He has divine power, divine mercy, divine love for us

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all. The Cross of His mysterious passion casts its healing shadow across the life of humanity ; but one man finds the commentary on that great fact written for him at Bethlehem and Nazareth, another comes to the great miracle of his soul's healing through the vision of the Master giving sight to blind eyes and strength to lame feet, bread to hungry multitudes, and life to the dead. Another reads the message of Calvary in the glory of that transfigured face on Hermon. For myself I can say that though I accept the miracles of Jesus as true history, the whole of them put together (saving of course the fact of the resurrection) do not reveal my Saviour to me so helpfully nor so convincingly in all the divinity of His loving power, as do the simple words, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me,' and many another word of perfect sympathy and many another unmiraculous deed of infinite love.

Some find the risen Christ as the Magdalene who found Him suddenly when He named her name. Some find Him in the doing of His will, as the disciples who cast the net in Tiberias, and found it was their Master and Lord they were obeying. Some go the journey to Emmaus—the way of many a heart-burning, many a meditation, many a mind and spirit struggle—and find Him in the breaking of bread. At the core of all Christian experience there

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lies the same eternal truth, for it is the same Christ who meets us all ; but many are the forms that experience can take. Therefore, let not the man who has met the Master in the garden of Joseph doubt that He was ever seen on the shore of Tiberias ; and let not him who hath found Him on that dawn-lit beach think it improbable that He ever walked and talked with the traveller to Emmaus.

'He appeared in another form.' These are words to hush for ever the foolish strife about modes of worship. There are those who look upon the eastern window of a cathedral, casting its glorious colours on altar-cloth and surplice and pavement, and say it stands for gross materialism. In their eyes the ritualist is an idolater. There are others who attend a meeting in a Salvation Army barracks, and go away and talk about irreverence. And they are all wrong. It does not follow that the Anglican is materialistic or that the Salvationist is irreverent. One man's history and temperament make symbolism and ritual invaluable to him ; another man's history and temperament make him glory in a form of worship that is stripped of everything that might be called in any way symbolic. The same Christ appears to each worshipper. There is no change of personality, there is only a change of form.

And may we not find in these words we are con-

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sidering just now a warning against associating the divine revelation of God in Christ too exclusively with the thought and activity of the Christian Church? It has been already demonstrated to the satisfaction of most thoughtful people that there is no quarrel between Christianity and Science. But it would seem in these later years that the scientists are themselves coming nearer and ever nearer to the Christian view of God and the world through that reverence, faith, and truth that are of the very essence of the truly scientific spirit. Science is no longer either hostile to, or contemptuous of, the Christian faith ; and it numbers among its great ones some who have come to the Cross of Christ through the mystery and majesty and infinity of the world that was made by Him. There is a reverent hush in the laboratories to-day. Many who have no regard whatever for orthodoxy have a supreme regard for truth, and are finding the truth along lines that are certainly not obviously evangelical.

'He appeared in another form.' There has come over the Christian Church in these last years a great change of view on more than one important part of the Christian creed. Our view of salvation is not so individualistic and self-regarding as it was. The oneness of the race, the socialism of the gospel, and the supreme self-forgetfulness of the Cross have taken

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men out of themselves, and wakened all the truly social and serviceable instincts of men's souls. Some are afraid of this tendency and teaching. There is no need to be. It is the same Christ revealing Himself to men in another, and maybe a truer form. Turn for a moment to the last words of our text, 'He appeared in another form unto two of them as they walked and went into the country.' May one linger for a moment on these words without incurring the charge of being slavishly literal and foolishly fanciful? As you have turned your face to the country, with its quiet lanes, and its blue sky, and its clean air, and all its peace and its music, have you never found great, glowing, unutterable thoughts homing in your heart, until some voice has whispered, 'He was in the world, and the world was made by Him,'—and lo, through the thin veil of earthly beauty, have you not seen His face? I have. For some the walk to Emmaus is a veritable 'apocalypse.'

So, my friends, as we ponder the mysterious manifestations of the risen Christ among the faithful and devout disciples, let us remind ourselves that this same Jesus is ever in our midst, and we must be ready to recognize Him in the garden of our hope and sorrow, on the Tiberias of our daily toil, in the beauty of the earth, and in every place where duty, pain, or love may take us.

XII

Imaginary Difficulties

And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone? And when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away.—MARK xvi. 3, 4.

In the story of the Passion-tide one cannot help noticing that women are in the foreground of almost every picture. When Jesus the King went to the Coronation of the Cross, the only jewels that shone upon the scene were the jewels of women's tears. And as one stands in the after-silence, one finds it is tremulous with women's whispers. Peter could say when all was over, 'I go a-fishing.' Two other men of that company of disciples could take a probably aimless walk to Emmaus. The men wanted something to do. They found relief in action. They said: 'It is all over, and now what shall we do?' The women said: 'It is all over, and there is nothing but to look on and weep.' And they were the first to know the truth.

In the supreme moments of life they fare best who trust their hearts. All who company with Christ

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must pass into hours of silence and mystery. And when our reason and our vision have taken us as far as they can take us, our instincts, our unreasoned faith, the simplest and the deepest things in our inward life, must lead us onward into the light.

As we look at these three women—Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome—whispering together in still, cool dawn-light, facing in their thoughts a difficulty they would never have to face in their experience, I think we can see a picture and a parable of our own attitude towards life. We borrow pains from unknown morrows, we walk wearily in the shadow of our forebodings, we are filled with manifold misgiving about things that have no existence outside our poor foolish hearts. What was the women's difficulty? What was the subject of that colloquy in the dawn? It was a stone, too heavy for their weak hands to move, which lay across the mouth of the garden-tomb. And when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away. Their difficulty was not in their situation. It was in themselves. That is where all the real difficulties are. It did not arise out of the real facts of the case; it was fashioned out of their ungrounded fears. Perhaps there is a word here, if we could find it, for the constitutionally timid—for

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those who are so made that they fall an easy prey to the spirit of despondency and fearfulness.

But let us take the larger view that shall include us all in the message of the situation. When they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away. Unseen hands had done for them that which they could not have done for themselves. The empty sepulchre tells us that though life is a problem, it is a solved problem. Part of that problem lies beyond the veil. 'Who shall roll us away the stone?' It is a grave-stone. Beneath it lies a loved friend. At least, we speak of him, even think of him, as lying there. And on that stone is graven the story of our earthly sorrow in the language of our heavenly hope. But I think not seldom the story counts for everything and the language for very little to the dazed and trembling heart. Facing that stone we face the greatest problem of all. Here on the borderland of the unknown we taste the bitterness of sorrow and face the mystery of destiny; and here God means us to feel the whole triumph of faith. 'When they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away.' At the touch of the scarred Hands the sepulchre was thrown open to the sunlight of that fair Sabbath morning. So do those same Hands unseal the grave over which the human heart breaks, that they who have passed beyond our ken

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may enter into the sunshine of the eternal Sabbath—there to find a warmer hand-clasp and a tenderer love than ours in the green fields of heaven.

My friends, are we not sometimes like these three women in the shadows of the dawn mourning their precious dead—their vanished Lord, when already He was passing joyous and calm in the sweet air of the garden, listening to the matin-song of the birds. We need the vision of the empty sepulchre. ‘He is not here. He is risen. Behold the place where they laid Him. He goeth before you.’ As these things were said of One who ‘tasted death for every man,’ we may say them of our dead. We may repeat them in the grey dawn of our heart’s trouble. ‘He is not here. He goeth before you.’ The shadows in which we walk are the shadows of our own ignorance and unfaith. We turn our eyes away from the tomb because we cannot pierce the darkness; but it might be with us, even as it was with the women, that our eyes should be turned away because we could not bear the light.

But the problem of life lies this side the shadows also; and here, as yonder, Christ has solved it for us. The empty tomb proclaims Jesus the Lord of life—the Lord of this life. ‘Who shall roll us away the stone? And when they looked, they saw the stone was rolled away.’

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What does that stone stand for? Shall we say it stands for sin? That is the very kernel of life's difficulty; that is the one great barrier in the path of human progress. Or rather it was once. It is not now. The sin that keeps a man back is no longer in his path—a stony barrier; it is on his shoulders, a burden to which he clings, under which he labours. Many a man is saying to-day, 'Who shall roll away the stone?'—is talking of sin as an insuperable difficulty in front of him. But that is not a true picture of sin. That is not a fair or just description of sin. If the coming of Jesus into this world meant anything at all, it meant that the path into the light was made clear for every man. The Risen Christ stands for the complete and final removal of every obstacle that lies in the Godward path of humanity. The sin that keeps a man back from God is a burden on his back, and not a barrier in his path. The real moral difficulty of life lies in our hearts. And like the Magdalene and her companions, we are kept back and filled with tremors, and hesitations, and shrinkings, and pleas of weakness, when we need but the faith—call it moral courage if you like—to go forward by the path of free grace, by the miracle of mercy, into light and peace.

Remember how those women missed for a time the solution of their difficulty. They said among them-

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selves, ‘Who shall roll us away the stone?’ They discussed the situation, and they might have gone on discussing it until the evening shadows fell, and the question would have grown no easier. The moral difficulty of life does not yield to argument. It only yields to action. Oh, these stones! What a fruitful topic of conversation they afford us! We proceed theoretically to locate them and measure them and weigh them—and then we never come to them. They are not there. ‘When they came to the sepulchre they saw that the stone was rolled away.’ A step is often worth more than an argument. In the moral world it is always worth more.

So my friend, if you are thinking about the right life, and pondering the difficulties that seem to make it impossible of attainment, the Easter message to you is this: Take a step. Go as far as you can, and you will find you can go as far as you ought. Get beyond your timidous speculations. Go to your Saviour—it may be as the women went, with a sad heart and in great perplexity and uncertainty—go to Him if you can see nothing but difficulty; and you shall find what they found, a clear way and a message of peace.

And in a more general sense we can apply such counsel as this to daily life and daily service. The women had spices in their hands, appropriate for

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embalming a dead body, a last tribute of love ; a mistaken offering, but serving none the less to stand as an illustration of the story that is so often told in life—the story of the full hand and the fearful heart.

The women paused in their tender ministry and their mission of love, not because they had nothing to offer, but because they were afraid they would not find a way to complete the offering.

‘Who shall roll us away the stone?’ What a story of unused power, of unoffered service, lurks behind that question!

Our lives get hedged about with hesitancy and misapprehension. But the Christ who has made clear for us the path of personal righteousness has made equally clear for us the path of personal service. The only hindrance to our usefulness is that which is found in our own hearts. The only thing that nearly makes us ineffective and futile in the service of the brotherhood, is our own unwillingness—for one reason or another—to seek to be of service. If any man keeps in his hands the sweetening and healing spices of life, it is because he has mis-read the situation.

The stone has been rolled away, and the Christ is in our midst waiting for our service ; and inasmuch as we have done it unto one of the least of these His

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brethren we have done it unto Him. The life of faith in the Risen Saviour is a life of continuous discovery. Along the line of His living purpose for us there are solutions, and explanations, and opportunities. And it stands true now, as it has ever stood, that the heart that has sought the Saviour at dawn or noon or eventide, with a gift to offer or a gift to ask, has alway been found of Him.

XIII

The Bruised Reed and the Smoking Flax

(A MESSAGE FOR THE NEW YEAR)

A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgement unto victory.—MATT. xii. 20.

A BRUISED reed and smoking flax. Under this twofold figure the prophet spoke of one thing—the compassion of God, the other-worldliness of the Infinite Love. Only the great heart of our heavenly Father is large enough to care for the world's bruised reeds and smoking flax—the lives that have lost the courage to go on or the hope and desire to begin. Let us look at the two parts of the figure separately, and let them each bring us, in their own way, to the self-same place—the place of mercy and help and hope.

A bruised reed—something that never was very strong, and that has had its little bit of strength for the most part taken out of it. A delicate and fragile thing that has been robbed of its elasticity and its power of self-recovery. Is not that a picture

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of so many lives after a strong and rough world has handled them? There are three things that go to the making of life's bruised reeds—sorrow, sameness, and sin. A few meetings with sorrow, a few vigils in the darkness, a few farewells, a few vacant places, and life becomes a bruised reed. A slackness creeps into its brave purposes, a misgiving tinges its outlook with grey, a doubt clings to the skirt of its best hope. And when a man has forgotten how to sing, and when the pulse of his life's best aspiration beats feebly, if there be one promise in the Bible that he needs more than another, it is this one about sparing the bruised reed. God knows the weight of the burden that is pressing upon your spirit and bowing your life earthward ; and He sends you the word of His tender mercy to tell you that the heart that is bruised shall not be broken. Rather it shall be gathered closer to the heart of the Eternal, where every strained and aching spirit may recover itself.

But there is a greater test of life's elasticity—life's power of holding its own—than sorrow, and that is sameness. More people fall victims to the tiresomeness of life than to its tears. The tragedies of life do not always occur in the storms of life. Beneath the grey skies of monotony, and beneath the sunlessness of routine, very sad things are happening. So many are the victims of the commonplace:

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dispirited by the prosaisms and repetitions of their daily experience. Sweet enthusiasms and lifting hopes slip out of men's lives; and they hardly mark the time of their going. But by-and-by they realize that they are gone. I think one of the greatest needs of our lives here on the threshold of the New Year, and indeed at all times, is something to hearten us. There are too many things that can set the seal of despondency a little deeper in our spirits: but there is one thing that can reverse the gloomy verdict of our weariness, and dispute the sombre conclusions of our weakness, and that is God's mercy for all feeble and failing things. 'A bruised reed He shall not break.' Shall we not thank God for sending us this flower of hope, with the dew of the heavenly fields upon it, to bear in our hands when we are tempted to think that we are treading a narrowing path in a fading light? The reed is bruised, but there is some life in it, some vitality, some promise of a stronger life. And the good God says to each one, 'Give that tired heart to Me, with all its weakened aspirations, and its eclipsed visions, and its spent enthusiasms, and its bruised hopes. Trust in Me, and I will bring it to pass.'

But after all, my friends, the real weakness of our lives comes not from sorrow, nor from sameness, but from sin. Oh, the staggering blows of temptation, the

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weakness that comes of so many compromises and concessions! Resolutions are broken, visions are disobeyed, good impulses unfollowed, and evil impulses unsought; and a man comes to lose heart about his own salvation, to lose interest in his soul, to drift slowly into the backwaters of comparative indifference or hopelessness. In the matter of spiritual purpose and endeavour, life has become a bruised reed. And God cares for it. He never gives any one up. He never lets any one go. He is willing to strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die; willing to take hold of all within any man's history and character and purpose that has any kinship with good, and to make it grow as the grain of mustard-seed in the parable grew. A broken resolution is not the worst thing in the world. It is not as bad as no resolution at all. It is, indeed, incomparably better. God be merciful to us for our broken vows; but God be thanked for all that led us to make these vows. It is all of His good mercy that we want to be right; and if it be that that good desire is all but dead in a man, and he feels there is little or no grip left in his will, and that all the moral fight has been taken out of him, let him hear the word of his God concerning the bruised reed. Let him dare to believe that there is still left the germ of deathless and victorious life in his bruised and

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battered reed of good desire. Let him know that the mercy of God has been about him all the time, or the reed would have been snapped in twain ere this.

Then take you the promise, O heart forlorn,
God never is tired of making anew
The earth that is weary and winter worn,
Or the life whose goodly deeds are few.

My friend, you may mourn and regret and take shame to yourself, and know that your good purpose and your will to do right are bruised beyond the telling ; but you shall not give yourself up to despair. Grapple to your soul this promise of another chance. Know that Jesus Christ came to the weak and the weary and the men who have failed, to make them strong and to give them victory.

And now let us gather to our hearts some of the hope and comfort hidden in the second figure the prophet used—smoking flax. There is the feeble beginning of a blaze. The fire is just smouldering. It can be fanned to a flame, or it can be quenched. Is not that an apt figure of the beginning of good in these hearts of ours? Smoking flax—the smouldering fires of penitence for sin, of moral resolution, of faint desire and frail tentative purpose going out towards the divine ideal. How is it, my

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brother, that they have not burst ere this into a cleansing or conquering flame? Perhaps it is your own fault. Very likely it is. Continually some sparks from the great central fire of holiness and love, or from the lowly altar-fires of the godly souls in the world, fall into men's hearts. And continually they are letting that spark die out when, by the breath of faith and prayer, it might have kindled the clear flame of consecrated living. Oh, this ministry of sparks! these beginnings of good! these intermittent and wavering inclinations towards good and towards God, in the hearts of the children of men! How little many profit by them! How few seem to realize that the great sin-consuming, life-cleansing fire of God's salvation is hidden away in them! What is the good of singing 'Refining fire, go through my heart,' when you are treading out the first sparks of that hallowing conflagration day by day? We too often undervalue our own experience. Who has not had a penitential mood, an unworldly longing, a heavenward impulse? And whosoever has let the mood pass with no clear moral advance, whoso has let the longing fail amid the charms and claims of lower things, he has received the grace of God in vain.

And now, in the light of this most merciful word of our God, this gospel for all who have the grace

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'to look at heaven and long to enter in,' let us face this New Year. Some of us, maybe, know we have fought a poor fight, and it only wants a word of bitter upbraiding to make deserters of us. That word will not be spoken. 'A bruised reed He shall not break.' Some, maybe, have the memory of brief penitences and hours of good desire that seem to have left life where they found it. But 'He will not quench the smoking flax.' My brother, the last word in our text is victory. 'Until He send forth judgement unto victory.' That is, victory for you and for me. There is in the infinite power and compassion of Jesus Christ a certain link between men's failures and God's conquest. The psalmist says, 'Thy gentleness hath made me great.' My brother, despise not this gentleness of thy God in His dealings with thy soul; and that same gentleness shall recover thee of thy sore hurt and quicken within thee the failing fires of aspiration and faith till thy life be one bright flame of love and victory.

XIV

Saints in Caesar's Household

The saints . . . that are of Caesar's household.—PHIL. iv. 22.

OUR text this evening is a picture. Some of us remember that in our early days we had a great fondness for one particular Bible. We loved it because it had pictures in it. If they were coloured pictures our devotion to that particular copy of the Scriptures was probably most exemplary. And we still love pictures. And maybe we should love the Bible better if we had eyes to see that it is full of pictures. Here is one of them. We may call it a full-page illustration of the doctrine of sanctification. ‘The saints . . . that are of Caesar’s household.’

The other names of this Caesar were Nero Claudius. Every one knows something of the infamy attaching to that name. The man who bore it stayed at nothing in satisfying his desires for pleasure or vengeance. He murdered his brother Octavius and his mother Agrippina, and at last, after a reign of fourteen years, and when only thirty years old, with a bloated body

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and a haunted mind, he committed suicide to escape a physically worse fate at the hands of his own soldiers. It was when Nero was twenty-six, and there were yet four years of his ever-darkening story to be lived out, that St. Paul, writing from Rome to the Church at Philippi, put this significant greeting into his letter: 'The saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.'

After what we know of the master of that household we can easily imagine the conditions of life that obtained there. We do not need to be told that all that was most impure and cruel in the life of the city centred there. And there, too, were some of God's children, a few faithful followers of Christ, bearing the shame and peril of the Cross as few since have been called to bear it. We cannot say certainly who these people were. It is very probable that some of them figure in the list of names that St. Paul put at the end of his letter to the Romans three years before. Very likely some were soldiers of the Praetorian Guard, doubtless some were slaves.

As we look at this picture, the word saint becomes an intensely real and practical word. The mediaeval conception of sainthood detached it from daily life. The possibilities of the cloister involved the limitations of the hearth. The spiritual value placed upon celibacy meant a proportionate depreciation of mar-

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riage and home life as a sphere for godly living. The honour placed upon the desert anchorite suggested a permanent and invincible disability in the way of any who sought to do God's will among their fellow men. And though Christianity has outgrown that maimed and meagre conception of practical religion, the influence of the early ages still makes itself felt. Of course if a man persisted in living day and night and in all weathers on the top of a pillar, like Simeon Stylites, we should not go and worship him, we should put him into a lunatic asylum ; but one is not quite sure that the ideal of a blameless life in the thick of the world is to some people a more reasonable conception of destiny. We hesitate to use this word saint as the description of our calling, not because our ideas of sanctity are so unutterably lofty, but because they are so little related to life as we have to live it. Some people as little expect to find saints in the thick of the world as they expect to find stained-glass windows in factories. But I am not quite sure that that is not where these windows and their stories would do the most good. At any rate, a good look at this picture of a few godly lives lived in the foul shadow of Nero's palace will help us to see that holiness of heart is an intensely practical thing—something that is made to stand all the shocks and strains of a sinful world.

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Saints in Caesar's household. Holy lives amid unholy influences. Moral health in the midst of moral contamination. What does it all mean? It means that the real determining forces of life are not from without but from within. Circumstance has much to say as to the conditions of our spiritual strife, but nothing as to the issues of it. God can save a man's soul without altering his circumstances. The grace that sanctifies life is neither local nor outwardly conditioned. It does not transform the world about us, but the heart within us. The love and grace and peace of God offered to all men everywhere in Jesus Christ: this is the secret of sainthood. It was this that those soldiers and slaves in Nero's palace had learned. The unhallowed tumult of Rome was all about them, and their very lives depended on the whims and caprices of their master; but spiritually their service was perfect freedom, and their lives were hid with Christ in God. Sanctification is not a transplanting; it is a transfiguration. It does not give life a new setting, but a new spirit.

'Saints in Caesar's household.' That is the one complete answer to all the misuse of the doctrine of environment. There are no conditions of life in which a man cannot with some pledge of success fulfil his moral obligations. Caesar's household is our stock excuse for all that is unhallowed and unchristian in

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our lives. ‘It is no good trying, it is no good hoping, to get the best of Rome at all points.’ When we say that, we do injustice to the divinity of our religion, misinterpret the laws that govern the life of our spirit, and hold with feeble grasp the thing that makes us men—the freedom of our will. The history of Christianity from the beginning has been one continuous conquest over environment. Christ in a man’s heart is stronger than the devil in a man’s pathway; and conversely the devil in a man’s heart is stronger than Christ in a man’s pathway. The victory always goes to the power that has captured the inner life—the imagination and affection and will. For saint or for sinner the final determining force of life acts from within. Having realized that, we are free to confess that the conditions of our lives do much to determine the ease or the difficulty of every course of action. And, as things are, every man who saves his soul saves it in spite of the world. Snares and enticements, subtle pleas of convention, harsh imperatives of necessity, the assumed authority and the attempted coercions of circumstance—these are the things that all who would be holy have had to face and to fight. And sainthood has always fought a victorious fight against these things. There is no heroism in the world like unto the heroism of the pure heart.

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When you are told that you cannot break with social usages, cannot despise unworthy traditions, cannot deviate from unsound business customs—when, in a word, the existence of the thing that ought not to be is made to prove the impracticability of the thing that ought to be—remember the greeting that came to the Christians of Philippi from the saints in Caesar's household. Every man can do what he knows he ought to do, if he is willing to pay the price of his obedience. Sanctity of life has always been possible—it has never been easy. Sainthood in Caesar's household cost some of these people their lives. They were made living torches to illuminate Nero's gardens—or sport for the crowd and food for the lions when Rome had a gala-day. And however civilization may have humanized and alleviated the conditions of our Godward efforts, there is still in every battle for the right a tragic note. Still there is a death it is life to die.

'Tis as hard at duty's call
To lay one's life down day by day
As to lay it down once for all.

And perhaps there has never been any saint quite so saintly as the saint in Caesar's household. To say, as I said just now, that these people were saints in spite

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of their surroundings, is only half the truth after all. Nero created for the Christians in his household an atmosphere in which no compromise was possible. There was not the faintest inducement to profess Christianity without feeling the inward convictions and compulsions and satisfactions of the faith. A saint in Caesar's household seems a wonderful thing ; but a merely formal professor of Christianity in Caesar's household would have been a far greater wonder. He would have had no *raison d'être*—nothing to justify his existence. For six years of my ministry much of my work was among soldiers, and I never met a Christian soldier who was not in downright earnest. It is not worth while being anything else in the army. The unfriendly and at times aggressively hostile attitude of the barrack-room develops an absolutely sincere and uncompromising type of religion. When a man gets religion in the army he has to be out and out. Among the soldiers I have met backsliders and saints, but never a mere professor of religion. There is no playing at religion there. And, my friends, whenever the shadow of Caesar's household falls on our lives, it brings us an opportunity for deepening our religious convictions, asserting our Christian principles, and defining more sharply to ourselves and to the world the outline of our divine ideal. We should count among the gains

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and advantages of life every situation in which the issues of life are clearly defined, in which light or darkness obviously wait our choice, and in which a non-committal, procrastinating policy is impossible. The frailty of our lives needs not only the sheltering shadow of almighty love, but also the stimulating and invigorating challenge of this world's unhallowed imperialism. The white flower of a blameless life grows best out of doors.

And the saint in Caesar's household is the truest triumph and vindication of the religion of Jesus Christ. In the sympathetic fellowship of the Church sanctity may find inspiration ; but it is amid the oppositions of the world that it finds its effective ministry. The world at its worst needs the Church at its best. Oh, for more saints in this great household where Caesar reigns ! The great need of the world has ever been the godly life in the ungodly home, flawless honesty amid the shady practices of business, crystal purity of thought and passion amid sensual and unclean things in social life.

Let us have done with the religion of which men are half ashamed, of which they ought to be quite ashamed, for it is but a parody of godliness. Let us be assured that if our religion requires to be apologized for we had better get rid of it altogether. The Christian was never meant to go through the world

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with a 'hope I don't intrude' look on his face. We ought to intrude. We are bound to intrude. Jesus was an intruder. Christianity is just ■ powerful splendid, infinitely justifiable intrusion. Let us not think to wear the pearl of great price beneath a veil of fine-spun compromise. That is the way to lose it. And let us know this, that if any man would serve Christ, the need for that service and the sphere of it are close to him.

To keep a pure heart amid a stained world, to live a straight, unselfish life where a lie meets you at every turn and selfishness is a great thing, to love the unlovely, to serve the needy, to bear with the foward and the weak, and to fear nothing but sin—this is to serve God and preach the gospel of His grace, and finally to sanctify Caesar's household.

XV

The Personal Note¹

I AM going to read to you three passages of Scripture, not with the idea of expounding any one of them, but simply that you may listen for and hear, ringing clear and true in each of them, what we will call the personal note.

The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.—Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.—GAL. ii. 20.

Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.—1 JOHN iii. 16.

In human life no interest is half so strong as the personal interest. We all have a world within the world—sometimes a very small one, never a very large one, always a very real one—the world of our personal concerns. The larger world cannot touch us as this can. The things that happen within the walls of a man's home mean more to him of gladness and of sorrow than the things that are noised round the globe. The other morning a

¹ Preached in the Manchester Central Hall,

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man read the awful story of the massacre of the Jews in Odessa, and felt that something terrible had happened; but before he had been at his office ten minutes he had forgotten all about it for the time. Two days afterwards death came, oh, so softly, into his home, and kissed his little lassie into the long sleep; and—well, he did not go to his office that day. He did not know that he had an office. He did not know he had anything. He rather thought he had nothing. We do not call him selfish. We do not babble to him about false perspective. We know it is the way we are all bound to look at life day by day. In the world where our hopes find their resting-place and our hands their work, life touches us continuously, directly, deeply. And we cannot get away from it. We may now and again stand under the dome of some great thought—the larger and cosmic conception of life—and let the benediction of insignificance fall on us as we see ourselves a tiny fraction of an infinite whole; but we live our lives under a lower roof-tree, and in a system whereof we are not an almost negligible fraction, but rather the centre. That is not egotism. It is responsibility.

Now, whatever religion may do with this intensely personal factor in human life (and of that more presently) it certainly recognizes it. There runs

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through the Old and New Testaments one simple, profound, and ever expanding truth—the basal truth of the religious life—the personal relation of every separate soul to God. This is the most precious thing in the Hebrew conception of religion. However much or little the devout Jew knew about God, he was perfectly certain that God knew everything about him, and cared everything for him. He felt the shadow of the infinite lying quiet and mighty across all his personal interests. And we need to look at him, and compare our view of God with his view, and our faith with his faith. We may find that such a comparison will be less to his disparagement and more to our gain than our twentieth-century assurance might lead us to anticipate. We may find we need to learn from some of the ancients the highest meaning of a simple and availing faith in God within the small area of our own life's interests. This is a day of long words, and long thoughts, and long views, and long—well, almost anything but sermons. We are widening our outlook. We are being carried up to great heights and told to look at things as a whole—to contemplate them in the mass. Science and philosophy have been thinking some big thoughts; and we are told to stretch out our minds to try to take them in. We are told to be detached and get beyond details.

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Now, I believe there is a lot of urgency and force in this sort of advice. But I do not think it quite recognizes the invincible dominance of the personal interest and the personal view. I think these wide views of life are a bit lonesome—I do not thank a man for stretching my mind if he cannot comfort my heart. Last summer I climbed the four hundred steps of the world-famous belfry in the market-place in Bruges, from which you might imagine yourself able to see all Belgium, if not the very ends of the earth; and the first thing I caught myself looking for was my hotel. It was that which concerned me. You may take a man to the mountain top, but it is no good pointing out the grand views till he has picked out his cottage and caught sight of the sun on its windows. That is the way we are made. And that is the way God comes to us. The first thing we have to face in life is 'that which concerneth me.'

And at the risk of seeming rather trite and old-fashioned, I should like to remind you that God has an interest in each separate soul. He comes to us not only in the laws of the harvest, but in the loaf on our table and the way it gets there. And there are things in the intellectual atmosphere of to-day—an atmosphere that perhaps the few analyse but that all breathe—that tend to obscure

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this thought in our minds and weaken this faith in our hearts. One of these things is our view of the way things happen, compared with the view that Moses and David were able to take. They saw God and the event, and nothing between. They said: 'The Lord thundered'—and we say 'It thundered,' but even for an electrician the former is the final word on the subject of thunder. Or listen to this: 'And it came to pass that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and out of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot-wheels.' We do not talk like that about God. We cannot see Omnipotence fingering the lynch-pins of our enemies' chariots. We are more philosophic than Moses. We have a whole string of explanations to run through before we get to God. That is as it must be. But are we quite as sure that the Lord is there in the morning watch looking upon our little lives out of the cloud of His mystery and the fire of His love, and that we have explained nothing till we have got to Him?

Again, we have a wider view of the material universe than ever David had. The idea of evolution is lighting many a dark place for us. But, like every light of earthly thinking, it casts its shadows. There

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are things it tends to obscure. We are learning to say, 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth the Universe—that which concerneth the race.' But men may find God in the heavens and miss Him at their hearth—find Him in the stars and miss Him in the street—find Him in the Universe and miss Him in the soul. We cannot think too widely and deeply about God ; but each one of us must begin with the psalmist's view, 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.' When you pass from philosophy to religion you do not pass to a new aspect, you pass to a new thing. Philosophy says, 'Cultivate the power of mental detachment ; keep yourself out of your view.' But religion is never pure theory. To depersonalize it is to extinguish it. The watchword of the philosophic life is detachment ; but the watchword of the religious life is experience. There is no safety, guidance, or comfort in a conception of God that is not an expansion of our experience—the carrying-out, as far as we can carry them, of the lines of thought that faith, worship, and love have drawn in our hearts. There are a thousand forces at work widening our thought ; but only the personal and experimental note ringing clear in it all can deepen it.

But further, the modern view of the universe

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that tends to obscure the individual and intimate aspect of the divine government of the world tends to have a similar effect on our view of salvation. Evolution out of bounds tries to substitute the idea of progress, which is a general idea, for the idea of redemption, which is a personal one. The solidarity of the race is a cardinal point in St. Paul's teaching, but so is grace for the individual soul. The first word in the gospel of Christ is personal and individualistic. And the dominance of the personal interest in life will never let us forget that word or slur it over. A man may describe Christianity to me as a force leading the race to an illustrious goal. But the first thing I say to him is: 'Where do I come in? How can I join this upward movement, and know I've found it, and feel the lift of it?' The Cross answers that question. At the head of the Godward march of life there stands the Christ, 'who loved me and gave Himself for me.' The Cross teaches me how that by faith and obedience I can focalize the Light of the world on my dark life, and find in the story of redemption 'the thing that concerneth me.'

I have paused to emphasize this familiar thought not so much for its own sake as to point out its significance in relation to Christian Sociology. Thank God that the Church is thinking so much of the

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present social problem. But there are certain ideas in the air concerning the social service of the Church which need looking at very carefully. There is a danger of our being too ready to impeach the individualistic conception of Christianity. Now the individualistic view is not exhaustive, but it is true. Say some: 'Christ came to establish a society. We must free ourselves from earlier ideas of the mission of Jesus; we must forget the poor narrow notions of our fathers—to say nothing, for mercy's sake, of our grandfathers, poor narrow people!' '*That which concerneth me.* That was good enough for David,' says an enthusiastic socialist; 'but we've passed that now. It's society now; it's the City now; it's the race now.' My friend, we have not finished with the personal concerns, and we never shall. The starker individualism did make sure of the individual; but depersonalized socialism can make sure of nobody. Let us not break the pivot on which everything turns. You must reckon with yourself. The individualistic and the social conceptions of Christianity are not in antagonism. They are complementary. And the quality of our socialism is determined by the quality of our individualism. We owe our fathers not criticism but gratitude. How comes it that the Church is advancing to-day with so much courage and enthusiasm and hope to meet the needs

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of the masses? It is not because the individualistic interpretation of the Evangel has been discredited. Quite the reverse. The Christian socialism of to-day is not a reaction from the individualism of yesterday; it is largely the product of it. For many a year our Church has been represented in city and village by a type of man who could say with David, 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me,' or with St. Paul, 'Who gave Himself for me'; and these are they who through their faith in God for the guidance of their lives and the saving of their souls have bequeathed to us a standard of faith and life that will be the secret of all the social service we shall ever do. We should not want to be on such close terms with the man in the street, if our fathers had not known so much about that 'friendship of the Lord that is with them that fear Him.'

The last words in the third passage I read to you are these: 'We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' That is the supreme doctrine of Christianity on the question of social service. But what goes before it? 'Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us.' That is the individualism of the Cross. St. John, with his unerring spiritual instincts, puts them in their right order. First the love I need, then the love I offer. First God and

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myself, then myself and my brother. First the response of my needy heart to the Saviour who loved me and gave Himself for me, then the enlargement of my personal concerns to the inclusion of all His love includes. First a sanctified individuality, then an availing and catholic service.

XVI

Sowing in the Evening

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.—ECCLES. xi. 6.

'IN the morning sow thy seed.' Here is a word of counsel for those whose lives are full of the eastern glory—a message to the young. Some of you are in the cool, clear dawnlight of your life. The world for you is not peopled with anxieties, cares, and regrets. The rosy light of hope is in your sky. You are living in the morning light of life's untold possibility. Nothing seems beyond your reach, if you desire to attain it; nothing seems beyond your powers, if you determine to accomplish it. The world is calling to you; life is whispering in your ear; and the call and the whisper are beautiful, mysterious, fascinating, promise-laden. It is nothing to you that some say the world is cold and cruel—shadowed with countless sins and crowded with myriad dangers. To you it is a

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fair, true world, where there are strong hands and warm hearts and throbbing joys. Whatever the world has denied to others, it is going to give to you love and faith and loyalty. It is going to welcome your enthusiasms, to foster your hopes, and to deal kindly with your dreams. Life has given you its word—and it will keep faith with you—and that you will believe, though a thousand should tell you that life is a perjured and a forsworn thing. You have its promise; and you cannot look into its bright eyes, you cannot look upon it standing before you lowly, gracious, suggestive, captivating, and say to its face that it is lying to you. Of course you cannot. And if you did you would be doing life a terrible injustice. People say that life has failed them; when the real truth of the matter is that they have failed it. The great opportunity that men call human life is not fickle, elusive, and treacherous, as some would have us believe. At the very core of it there is love that cannot fail, justice that cannot be unjust, law that must enforce itself.

The mistake that so many people make, and against which I wish to warn you just now, is this. They look upon the promise of life one-sidedly. They do not realize that life cannot keep faith with them who break faith with it. Life, as it

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comes to a young heart, does not merely say, 'I have come to make you a promise.' It says, 'I have come to ask you to enter into a pact, an agreement; and if you will keep faith, I will.' The earth yields according to the seed that is sown therein. No man would ask us to sympathize with him for his bare fields—looking all the barer in contrast to his neighbour's sweep of corn—if he had idled away the seed-time. The farmer has to keep faith with the land, with the laws of life, with nature, with nature's God. And that is the word that I give you now. 'In the morning sow thy seed.' Do not laugh and dream away those precious sun-lit hours. There is real and serious work to be done. Do not let the brightness of life blind you to the gravity of it. We think of life as getting more and more responsible as the years pass by. We think that life has a right to demand more of middle age than it demands of youth. And there is a sense in which that is a true view of life. But it does not represent the whole truth. It is the new things of which we take the most care. It is the new ventures into which we enter with the most thoughtful consideration. We are continually recognizing the value of beginnings.

And thus should we look on life. It is yours to-day—whole and beautiful. It is worth more

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as a possibility now than it will ever be worth again. It has not been plundered and battered by the rough and thievish years. Part of its treasure has not slipped through your fingers. How are you going to use it? How can you make the most of it? Under the familiar figure of the sower and his seed-basket, our text says to you as you stand in the sun-lit fields of youth, 'In the morning sow thy seed.' Do not dream away your enthusiasms and your possibilities. Do not let the most responsive and pliable years of life pass by in comparative idleness. Do not look down the length of years, and wonder what may be; look at to-day, and decide what shall be. You can see in the distant days a man, a woman, strong, pure, capable, useful, happy. But that beautiful figure that we call achievement is you yourself; only your name to-day is 'possibility.'

The morning is the best time to work. There is a spring and elasticity of hope and purpose that is the birthright of beginners. Thank God that we do not have to stake everything on these things—or few people would do any good work after they had turned thirty. But youthful years have a meaning and a value that enters into and affects the years that follow. There is never a day in the longest life when the foolish, wasteful, sinful

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soul may not turn to God, all-merciful. But no man can consecrate his past save by consecrating his present. Sow the seeds of faith and prayer and obedience day by day, and God shall answer you now and in the coming years more fully than He could answer if you came to Him in the glare of the noon-tide or the shadows of the night, with the story of a wasted morning-time.

'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand.' As we read the second part of our text the scene changes. We have been watching the daylight flood the earth—have heard the song-birds, and felt the breeze from the sparkling meadows. Now the light is failing, the shadows are gathering in the hollows, and the birds have finished their song. And the failing light often means a failing spirit. For some of you here the morning is only a memory now. You meant to have lived sweetly and loftily ; but the world has often dragged you down to the level of its aims and its sins. Oh, the compromise and weakness and wilfulness ! Oh, the things that might have been and now cannot be ! There is no lash in life more sharp and merciless than the memory of wasted years.

But the opportunity of life is as long as life itself. Whatever may be the value of the days that are

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yours no more, there is precious and eternal worth in the present as you hold it in your hands. 'In the evening withhold not thine hand.' That is another way of saying, 'Do not give yourself up as a bad job.' Oh, this sowing in the evening! It is hard work. There are a hundred things that make it difficult. To hope on when so many hopes lie unfulfilled ; to turn again, seek for peace, and purity of heart, and self-conquest, and the unworldly view, when the past is full of the story of unrest, and sin-stain, and moral failure, and worldliness of purpose and endeavour—this is a hard counsel to follow ; but it is perfectly possible and absolutely sound. So many yield to the temptation to withhold their hand. They accept their failure as inevitable and final. They lie where they have fallen without making any attempt to get on their feet again. Many a man is saying to himself to-day, 'Ah, well, I have had my chance like the rest. It was a good chance. It was a splendid chance. And I've missed it. If only I could go back and begin all over again, those morning years should tell a different tale. But it is too late now. I have made myself what I am, and now I must accept the consequences of my doings.' Oh, my brother, do not say that! Do not let a few shadows take the heart out of you. You

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are tired and cold, and the light is bad, and things do not look promising, and there is not so much time; but I can hear a voice that is meant for you, and it says, 'In the evening withhold not thine hand.' The inspiration of youth, of novelty, of untried hope, of physical and mental freshness, has passed away; but the real inspiration of life is still yours, even the word and the Spirit of the Lord of the harvest. It is never too late to make a fresh start. It is never a vain thing to break up the fallow ground of your heart. It is always infinitely worth while to come to Christ and to make a plea and a promise at the foot of His Cross.

Can it be true, the grace He is declaring ?
Oh let us trust Him, for His words are fair.
Man, what is this, and why art thou despairing ?
God shall forgive thee all but thy despair.

God will never give you up. Do not give Him up. Do not give yourself up. Sowing is a work of hope. Therefore dare to hope. Amid the shadows of failure and shame and despair of yourself, hear the voice that tells you that all is yet left you—a heart that was made to love, a will that was made for obedience, and above you and about you the limitless, merciful promise of heaven.

'Withhold not thine hand.' It is so easy to begin,

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but so hard to keep on. Part of the battle of life for us all is against sheer weariness of spirit. There is that besetment of your life. You have been sowing the seeds of resistance—only to see the promising ears of victory blighted or broken down by the storm. There is that grace of character that you know you need. You have sown so much seed of prayer and patience and effort; and yet to-night you are not what you ought to be or what you hoped to be. The tired spirit says, 'Give it all up. What's the use of further endeavour?' But One who knows life and its pain and its possibility perfectly, meets you in that field of your life that has cost you the most toil and brought you the least return, and says, 'In the evening withhold not thine hand.'

Some of you here are workers for God. You can look back over years of service. And you have had your successes. But across your enthusiasms, your hopes, and your resolutions there creeps the evening shadows of monotony, and of partial disappointment, and of dissatisfaction. 'I've done enough now,' says one. 'It is the turn of a younger life.' Yes, but it is your turn still. Life never loses its meaning, its value, or its urgency. The longest stretch of years cannot carry a man beyond the voice of the great imperative. Every hour we are

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face to face with life's infinite possibility. So then let us take this twofold message, that embraces life from dawn to dusk, and go forth, young and old alike, to toil hopefully and faithfully in the field of life—believing in that harvest that shall one day be reaped by the angels.

XVII

The First and the Second

*He taketh away the first that He may establish the second.—
HEB. x. 9.*

THE writer of this letter had a great task before him. He had to try to make some people see the meaning of a loss. In what tender and masterly fashion he did his work it matters not to us for the moment. Suffice it to say one can scarcely conceive of it being done better. The letter was written to some Jews who could not reconcile themselves to the loss of the Temple, with its splendid ritual, its stately and impressive worship, its wealth of form and type, and its endless symbolism. Whilst in some sense entering into the spirit of the new day, they were still partially dominated by the habit of a thousand yesterdays.

We can only look with sympathy on those Jews in their difficult passage from the old to the new. It is not easy to abandon an established tradition. Habits of thought and conduct get a wonderfully

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strong hold upon nations and upon individuals. One can clearly see that the Christian Jew would be very slow at times in realizing the meaning of the new conditions of spiritual life involved in his acceptance of Jesus Christ. So to these men in their passing confusion of thought—to these men who understood far better what they had lost in the passing of the Jewish Temple than what they had gained in the founding of the Christian Church —came the writer of this letter to the Hebrews, to enter into their difficulties, to show them that upon the loss against which they were feeling resentment and uttering it, there was being built an immeasurable gain which they but dimly appreciated.

We do not know who wrote this letter to the Hebrews. I can find it in my heart to regret the anonymity of the writing. I think the writer deserves a place among the red-letter saints. He is the apostle of 'patient reasonableness.' He was able to see and willing to deal with the difficulties that certain men found in the Christian faith. There is no chapter in all its history of which the Christian Church need be so heartily ashamed as that chapter that is headed 'Men with Difficulties.' The Church has been so mortally afraid for its reputation and its peace of mind that it has found short shrift for the man with a kink in the skein of his thought or

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with a disability born of his history. There are several Epistles to the Hebrews waiting to be written. But to come to this one. The key-note is found in our text, 'He taketh away the first that He may establish the second.' The writer says, 'I acknowledge you have lost something—something very beautiful and comforting, something that has met your national need for centuries. But I want you to look beyond that loss, and find the splendid meaning of it, and see how that it is really the condition of a nobler worship and a larger life than ever Israel has known before.' He taketh away. This is God's work. And God's taking is just the otherwise of His giving.

Now, the Jews stumbled over a principle that is written clearly in the world's life, and that we stumble over too. 'He taketh away that He may establish.' That is the story of evolution in a breath. Every flower, every bird, every beast, has a story of loss behind it. It is the outcome of countless struggles and deaths. Ten thousand things have gone that this might come. Ten thousand things have ceased to be that this might be. And by-and-by this shall go also, that something may stand in its place and be a little nearer the beautiful as God sees it and the perfect as God plans it. And in the quiet and yet at times tragic march

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of life towards some illustrious goal, we see the fair things and the fit things and the strong things filling the forward ranks, and we do not grieve over the things that drop out.

But when we face this principle of evolution in our own life we get confused. Let us look at it just now very quietly and simply. Let us see what a mighty thing it is; and how in the hands of God, and in spite of our foolish frustration of it, it always makes for something better, higher, more beautiful. ‘He taketh away the first that He may establish the second.’ That is the philosophy of growing up. The first was beautiful; we call it our childhood. It was joy without a shadow of care—being without responsibility. And it has been taken away in order to make room for a fuller, stronger life—a life that knows the glory of effort, the thrill of costly hoping, and the ceaseless struggle for expression and fulfilment. There is a song that says, ‘Make me a child again’; but we would not go back. The second is greater than the first. It always is when God takes and gives. You have only to look back and you can find a precious parable of gain by loss running through your maturing years.

‘He taketh away the first that He may establish the second.’ That is the story of the soul’s growth

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into the knowledge of God and the fuller sense of all things spiritual. One who was an expert in the inward things once said, ‘Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual.’ That is the philosophy of conversion. It is a taking away of the first—the first conception of good and gain, the first ideal of life, that another conception and ideal may take their place. The first is of the earth earthy—the second is of God. And that is an epitome of the whole process of salvation, both for the individual and for the community. He taketh away the outward that He may establish the inward, the seen that He may establish the unseen, the material that He may establish the spiritual. The Jew had a religion that appealed to his senses. It was to some extent spectacular. Its tendency was temporal and local. It was a religion of times and places. He could not cling to it and at the same time enter into the timeless and universal gospel of Jesus Christ. And so the vision of the eyes had to go that the vision of the heart might grow clearer. The vision of Jerusalem of Judæa had to fade that the Jew might see the New Jerusalem, the City of God, coming down from heaven—a city ever being builded of all gentle, peaceable, pure, faithful and selfless lives.

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This is God's way with us. 'He taketh away the first.' What is the first? Faith in the world of men and things. The Christian religion does not make men suspicious, cynical, or distrustful. No man lives very long in the world without having a fairly liberal opportunity of developing all three qualities. But the set of circumstances, the course of experience, which so often develops these things is meant in the purpose of God to develop something very different. The breaking of human faith is meant to lead us to rest in the divine faithfulness. The final lesson to be learned from the manifold uncertainty of human life is neither the sneer of the cynic nor the wail of the pessimist—it is the infinite reliability of God. He taketh away the first, which is faith in the tangible and contingent and relative, that He may establish the second, which is faith in the invisible and eternal and real.

Again I ask, What is the first? Perhaps it is self-confidence—proud, masterful, irreverent, self-reliance. Do you remember so-and-so? What a self-contained and self-satisfied man he was! He went his own way, and in the main it seemed a very successful way. You rather admired that way of his. You called it ideal. That was not God's ideal for that man's life. It is not His ideal for

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any life. You remember that dark days came upon that sure man—losses in his business and shadows in his home. In the market his shrewdness failed him, and an empty place in his home taught him the lesson of his heart's need. You pitied him in those days of prostration and sorrow. 'Poor fellow; things are going very badly with him just now.' Thus you spoke, and you never made a greater mistake. Things never went better with him than then. People said he lost a thousand pounds' worth of business last year; and there was that mound in the churchyard. But that was not all. The story of loss had a divine purpose and a divine sequel. God was taking away the first confidence that was in self and things seen, and was establishing in that man's heart a second confidence in Christ and things not seen. The whole basis of that man's thinking and planning and hoping has been shifted from the human to the divine.

That is but an illustration of a work that is going on in human life every day—how the impoverished become rich in faith, and the sufferers strong in patience, and the sorrowful capable of sympathy. This is a principle of God's dealing with life; and shall be, until in the beautiful mystery of the hour of our passing He shall take away the earthly life that He may establish the heavenly.

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Once you clearly realize that it is the set purpose of God to make you spiritual in all your thinking and hoping and desiring and toiling, and you have a key to your whole experience. Much will explain itself; much in the story of your days will become not altogether difficult of comprehension when once you have grasped this principle of establishment that underlies the discipline of loss. 'He taketh away the first.' So many only get as far as that. Some possibly think that there is nothing more to be said. My friends, it is tragic to put a full stop there. If loss is meaningless—if all that can come of it is a harvest of uninterpreted pain—then love does not rule the world and God is not merciful. 'That He may establish.' That is the vindication of love. The purpose of God for every human life is positive and constructive. The ultimate issues of all life, so far as God has His way in life, are issues of enrichment and fulfilment and establishment. And if we cannot understand at times how such issue can be secured, let us never doubt that it will be. If we are perplexed with the means, let us not grow uncertain about the end.

There are two passages in the New Testament which, taken together, form perhaps the most perfect illustration of this principle of which we have been thinking that can be found anywhere. They are

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these: 'I go unto My Father. I am with you always.' Jesus Christ took Himself from His disciples' eyes that He might give Himself to their hearts. They lost the first, the earthly presence, that they might find the second—the spiritual presence. And as we seek ever to have the Spirit of Christ and to do His service, so in countless ways shall this great principle of true gain by seeming loss have effect on our lives. Ever we shall be losing the less to find the greater; losing the outward to find the inward; losing selfishness to find the true self; losing semblance to find realities; all the former things shall have passed away and all things shall have become new.

XVIII

Burdens

Cast thy burden upon the Lord.—Ps. Iv. 22.

Bear ye one another's burdens.—GAL. vi. 2.

For every man shall bear his own burden.—GAL. v. 5

THESE three passages have one thing in common—they all deal with burden-bearing. They show us how there is a gospel in the burden we bear, a revelation that comes with the weight and weariness of life.

'Cast thy burden upon the Lord.' That is the burden revealing unto us the gracious and merciful divinity above us. That is the weight of life bringing us to God. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' That is the burden revealing the needy, weary humanity all about us. That is the weight of life giving us to our neighbour in the sympathy born of a common experience. 'For every man shall bear his own burden.' That is the burden revealing us to ourselves. That is the weight of life folded in lonely responsibilities, untransferable obligations, and per-

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sonal discipline. So each passage in turn will stand out before us as in the daily burden-bearing our thought goes upward to God, outward to our fellows, or inward into our own spirit. The weight of life helps us to get hold of the meaning of life. It is this sense of weight, this burden-bearing, against which we are so often found protesting, that is after all no small part of our secret of understanding. No man can understand life if he takes it lightly. Frivolity is essentially superficial. It is in the deep gravity, the strong necessity, of life that men come into the kingdom of the wise. And so, with these three passages as a guide, I should like to try to show you how, when we stoop to bear life's burden, we find its explanation.

Let us trace this word burden through each passage. 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord.' The weight of life and the vision of God. The heart's weariness and the divinity above it. There is a sense in which life is a burden we were never meant to carry. It is too heavy for us. We stoop and strain and struggle, but life is too much for us. We are not equal to it. There is an undeniable inadequacy in the human spirit to meet the whole demand of existence. And herein men think they have found a radical mistake in the constitution of things. That I cannot manage life by myself

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proves that there is something wrong. Yes, there is something wrong—the attempt to manage it. We were never meant to be equal to life. And every masterful, unmanageable, impossible hour of experience, that so often puzzles us and confuses us, is just a vindication of that high wisdom that knows that the human spirit seeks the divine strength through the gateway of weakness and weariness. Prayer is a corollary of impotence. Faith makes its strongest plea when life meets its weakest hour.

'Cast thy burden upon the Lord.' That is a word written most largely, maybe, in the life of the saint with whom simple faith that leans on the heart of God has become a habit of life; but it is written elsewhere. It contains for some the very alphabet of revelation. How many would never have known the Lord but for the burden! The weight came first, and the light afterwards. I know that is not the only way into the saving presence of God. Some come there with light and joyous steps. Some come there ere they learn that life has a burden to bind on their shoulders. Maybe that is the best way. I do not know. But some could tell us how they were driven back on God—how that the prayer for help, the acknowledgement of the divine Helper, was crushed out of their hearts by the pressure of pain and need. But, be that as it may, this word

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about casting our burden upon the Lord refers not merely or mainly to an act of faith occasioned by some special stress of experience, but to an attitude of spirit to be maintained every day whatever that day may bring. We need to lean hard on the Father's arm and live close to His heart, not only when life is making its greatest demands and sorrow is delivering its most bitter message, but also in all the days of moderated demand and modulated sadness. We need the Divinity above us, not only when some strong sin challenges us to mortal conflict, but also in the days when, with slow unyielding persistence, Satan tries to wear down the defences of the soul. And so this first passage exhorts us to commit ourselves wholly and always unto God. Not just to fall back on Him as a last resource, not just to grope for Him in the darkness of a great trouble, but rather to feel that the everlasting arms are ever about us. And the answer to a faith like that is an inward answer.

'He shall sustain thee.' It is not the burden, but the burden-bearer, that God sustains. It is not the heavy sorrow, but the bleeding heart that He takes into His strong keeping. So we can only give God our burden by giving Him our life. At this point the figure of a burden fails accurately to represent the toil and trouble of life, unless you

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remember it is a burden that cannot be laid down. It is bound to our shoulders by the cords of many necessities, divine and human ; and the answer to our prayer for help does not come in a loosening of these cords, but in inward refreshment of spirit. So, my friends, this exhortation to us to cast our burden on the Lord and this promise of His sustaining grace do not speak to us of an occasional expedient to which the more trying experiences of life may drive us, but of the true relation of our life to God day by day. It is only natural that the greater the trouble the sooner we shall be compelled to look unto God for help ; but if we are to find Him in the darkness we must go to Him often in the light. There is an old Celtic proverb which says, 'The day the storm blows is not the day to thatch your cabin.' Even so the day of urgent need and unspeakable pain is not the best day in which to commence your quest of God. It is true God does hear the cry for help wrung from a life that in better days has not taken Him into its counsels—that He comes a long way to meet us down the path of prayer we have all too infrequently trodden ; but He calls us to a more complete trust in Him than this. We are to lean on His might in the days when circumstances fail to remind us of our frailty and we are for a while loosed from the burden of great cares. And

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the confidence with which we can go to God in the day of the heavy burden and the hard way, comes from the simple belief we have come to have in Him in the days of 'green pastures and still waters.' In feudal times the peasantry used to build their little cottages beneath the shadow of their lord's castle-walls so that in time of need they could easily take refuge within the stronghold, and so that by their very proximity to their master's dwelling he might be reminded that they cast upon him the burden of their safe-keeping. So may we build the frail house of life beneath the shadow of the Almighty, that in the day of sore need we may surely find the way into the secret of His presence.

Never a battle with wrong for the right,
Never a contest that He doth not fight,
Lifting above us His banner so white ;
Moment by moment we're kept in His sight.

Never a trial and He is not there,
Never a burden that He doth not bear,
Never a sorrow that He doth not share ;
Moment by moment we're under His care.

Now let us look briefly at the second exhortation. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' We have been talking of the law of the divine Fatherhood : here we have the law of our human brotherhood. But unless we have some understanding of the first it

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is no good talking about the second. This word about bearing 'one another's burdens' is not a mere motto of socialism. It is the fulfilment of the law of Christ. It is the service of unselfishness. It involves the leisure of the heart. It is a perfectly spiritual exhortation, and as such it must be received. There is the larger vision involved. A man cannot see other people's burdens when he is stooping helpless beneath his own. The weight of life does not bring a man nearer to his neighbour unless it first of all has brought him nearer to his God. Socialism teaches an insufficient doctrine of sympathy. It says, 'I can help because I have needed help myself.' That sounds feasible, but it is untrue. For the world that knows not God the weight of life makes for selfishness. Men grow too absorbed with their own affairs, too closely beset with their own difficulties, to give much thought to those of their neighbour. And even if they could realize the burden on other lives, they could do little to relieve it. I must lean on God if my friend is to lean on me. I must trust the Father above me if I am to help the brother at my side.

Just what this burden-bearing means one cannot say—for it means a different thing in each life. It is all that sympathy and faith and self-forgetfulness can do. It is not a pretty sentiment—a mere figure of speech. It is the great and manifold service of

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love, that needs all the wisdom and strength and patience that we can bring to it, and that can be wrought in a thousand ways. Occasionally this burden-bearing can be done very literally when we can take on to our own shoulders for the bearing, and into our own hands for the doing, that which for another was too heavy and too hard. But more frequently it must take the form of the indirect and mediate service of sympathy. In the great league of pity and help to which we are all called, and in which, if only we are unselfish enough, we can all find a place, we ever find that the best thing we have to give to the world is our influence. No man liveth to himself. Every life is ever adding to or diminishing the burden of other lives. There is an infinitude of interaction—much of it beyond our tracing ; and in so far as we carry through life a cheerful, patient, responsive, and unselfish spirit we shall be doing something every day to make the burden of others easier to be borne.

Now look for a moment at the last of the three passages we read at the beginning. ‘Every man shall bear his own burden.’ Here we are not called upon to avail ourselves of a heavenly privilege, or to fulfil an earthly duty—we are called upon to face a fact. Willing or unwilling, righteous or unrighteous, ‘Every man shall bear his own burden.’ There is a

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nameless shadow on these words. They tell the story of heredity, and all in our lives for which we are in no wise responsible, and concerning which we have been able to make no choice. They speak, too, of the consequences of sin—the remorse that chafes an awakened conscience, and the weight of unavoidable consequences, physical and moral, that attend wrong-doing. But turning from that aspect of the subject, what do these words mean for those who are living the life of faith and of fellowship? They speak of the untransferable burden of responsibility for all that is in our life. If you look into things you will see that this burden must be borne alone. To lose this burden we should have to lose our very being. The meaning and dignity of life lie in our lonely personal responsibility to God. He cannot bear this burden for us. He could only lighten it by giving us to live a lesser and a lower life. To ask God to lighten this load would be to ask Him to take back some of the precious life-powers with which He has endowed us—to cloud our mind, or blunt our conscience, or bind our freedom of choice. If anything should be taken from this burden, the step would not be lighter, but the life would be the poorer.

'Every man shall bear his own burden.' That also is the discipline of life. The heart knoweth its

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own bitterness. God lets us feel the weight of our own mortality. There are tears He does not hasten to wipe away. There are periods of temptation that must not be abbreviated. Herein we feel the weight of life, and God lets us feel it, that He may not frustrate His own work of discipline in our souls. It is His way of developing our lives and making us strong. The union between ourselves and our Saviour is a yoke. If it were not on His shoulders as well as ours, we should be crushed ; but if it were not on our shoulders as well as His we should live dwarfed and undeveloped lives.

God gives us most in that life that each must live alone. The battle with unbelief and selfishness ; the daily revelations of a worthier life that keep us at war with ourselves ; the great resolves that grow up in our heart's stillness ; the sadness of the irrevocable, and the conflict of hope and fear,—it is in these things that God comes nearest to us, and helps us to get nearer to Him and to our brethren.

So then, this is a threefold message about burdens. We are to face ourselves and our lonely responsibilities and the way of pain that is ours to tread ; we are never to forget that we live among those who are often wearier and sadder and needier than ourselves ; and for their sake and our own we are to lean all our life on the great heart of God the Father.

XIX

The Greater Love

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. —JOHN xv. 13.

Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. —I JOHN iii. 16.

I WANT to speak to you this morning of the greater love. That is what our Saviour calls the love unto death. No man has greater love than that, but many men have less. Oh, this love of the brotherhood, that dares all, gives all ! It is this that the world needs. It is this that the world cannot resist. We find among men a cynicism and hardness and indifference and selfishness that seem to baffle us continually ; but the bafflement for which we too easily blame the world not seldom has its true explanation in our own hearts. There is lack of love—this greater love, that can get right down beneath the hard and unresponsive strata of human character, and find a living response in that which all but love has found unresponsive.

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But, you say, men sneer at love. They say there is no room for it. One listens to the clamour of much self-seeking ; one looks upon the dusty and meanly fashioned ideals of the day, and is half inclined to think that love is being crowded out. There seems to be some reasonableness in the plea that a man cannot afford to listen to the voice of love or obey its commandment. You cannot be really successful if you are sympathetic. A soft heart is too expensive a luxury for the world as men find it. That is the earthly dictum, boldly uttered here and there, secretly believed in many places. But there are moments when most men suspect, and hours when some men come to know once for all, that what they say about love is a terrible and a ghastly mistake—if it is nothing worse. Love will always be the highest and the most availing thing in the life of the world—and after that, for ‘love never faileth.’ When the word of the prophet and the song of the singer have fallen on silence, and when the wisdom of the wise is as a forgotten tale, love shall live, love shall be all.

Aye, and when prophecy her tale hath finished,
Knowledge hath withered from the trembling tongue,
Love shall survive and love be undiminished,
Love be imperishable, love be young.

And if the one thing in human life that shall live on, deathlessly beautiful, endlessly satisfying, is love,

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it seems strange that love should ever fail to win the world's reverence and its heart—strange that men should sneer at love. But do they? That statement needs to be qualified. They sneer at the lesser love, the love that is but a poor bloodless parody of the divine reality, the love that fails them, fools them, and forgets them and even wrongs them, because it has nothing in common with true love saving a name—because it is a hesitant, calculating, self-regarding something that is part weakness, part selfishness, part romance. The thing at which men sneer, as well they may, is a certain cheap indeterminate, timorous sentiment that poses as love, and leaves a tired and sorrowful world unhelped and uncomforted. But the greater love, the love that lays down its life, quietly, simply, always—no man ever saw this and sneered at it. No man ever looked this love in the face, and saw all that was written there, and made a mockery of it.

But you say, 'What about One whose name was Love, and whose life was love? They mocked Him. They crucified Him. They took the greatest love of all, and wreaked their spite upon it.' Yes, I am not forgetting that. How could any one speak to his fellows of the greater love and say nothing about Him? But do you remember what He Himself said? 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they

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do.' If they had seen all there was to see, they would never have done what they did. None but the blind could ever have put a crown of thorns on the brow of love. And love has always been willing to wear it, for love knows that men oftentimes fail to recognize her till they have pressed down that crown upon her brow. The world has always made love suffer, and yet it is the traces of that same suffering in the face of love that soonest tell men what love is and bring them to her feet. It is ever by much suffering that love comes into its kingdom. But, mind you, it does come. As surely as it has its pain, so it has its victory. It is true they mocked the Man of Love and crucified Him. But it is just as true that He hath a name that is above every name ; and the anthem of His praise is surely spreading through the world. And it shall be given to all who learn to love as He loved, to share in His sweet, glad victory. For I say again that the world is bound in the end to listen to the voice of the greater love—whose robe is sympathy, and whose work is self-sacrifice. There is a soft, strong, masterful compulsion in the voice of all real sacrifice, that men cannot quite get away from, and which, at some time in his life, every man is unspeakably glad to hear. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life.' That is where all the emphasis falls. 'Lay down his life.' That is a perfect picture of the greater love.

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What is laying life down? It has meant and it might mean again, looking quietly into the grey face of death. Men have done that out of their heart's brave, selfless love, and the story of such love is one of the undenied treasures of human history. But that is a very imperfect view of the great principle of which these words speak. There is a way of taking life up that is the true laying down of life. Let me illustrate what I mean by something that is only a rare occurrence in the world of men, but which serves to shed light on the point I want to make clear. More than once in the long story, a man—perhaps more often a woman—would have found it an easy and even a sweet thing, to have passed from the hunger and loneliness of some stricken hour into the fellowship awaiting them beyond the River. But they turned with a brave, sweet earnestness to the life that was left them to live, determined to live it out strenuously and fully and to the last heart-throb, for the sake of others, for the sake of that great love of Christ, that helps men to leave with God the joy that lies in the keeping of other days, and perhaps another world—that they may do something to ease the burden and heal the sorrows of their brethren in the world. They have taken life up, and that has been in the truest sense their laying down of life.

But let us try to get this great thought about 'lay-

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ing life down' nearer to the levels of simple and common experience. We ought to lay down our lives. There is a call for the love that is thus measured and thus manifested, everywhere and always. The principle of sacrifice folded in our Saviour's words does not find its full illustration in some act of tragic self-devotion, nor in the long tragedy of resignation. It is something nearer to common experience and necessity than these things. One has said :

'Tis as hard at duty's call
To lay one's life down day by day,
As to lay it down once for all.

Yes, that is it. Laying life down day by day. Always doing it. To live, not for your own pleasures, but to make gladness more possible for such as walk in the shadows of many sorrows, in order to make godliness more possible for such as stand in the tense darkness of great temptations, to set others ever first, to pass into the life of the world each day to minister and not to be ministered unto,—this is the greater love, and they who do these things have heard it speak. The music of its message has got into their hearts, and now nothing else will satisfy them. Now they know that the wealth of life is its outpouring ; and that the one priceless treasure for humanity's finding and wearing is the heart's unselfishness.

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Oh, that we could come to believe in the might of the greater love! Nineteen hundred years ago there was lived in Galilee and Judaea a life that is to-day transforming humanity. That life had but one secret, and it was this: 'I lay down My life. No man taketh it from Me. I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' The inner thought of redemption is the love that is unto death, the infinite renunciation, the living sacrifice. That love is the reason for ours. St. John says in those simple words that started our train of thought this morning: 'We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, because He laid down His life for us.'

In the very next breath we find the apostle talking about a man who knew that his neighbour was hungry, and would not give him bread, though he had the means to do so. That links together the greater love and daily bread. There is no link in all our creed more important than that. We too often associate the idea of the greater love with life's most extreme and tragic possibilities. We should need it then. Yes, we should; but we need it now. The greater love not only meets great occasions, it makes them. There are no commonplaces in the life of sacrifice. True unselfishness is always regal and sublime. In the eyes of love nothing is common or

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unclean. Oh, when shall we come to understand that we need the passion of Calvary to give the best direction and effect to life's simplest services? Do you remember Christ's last words to this disciple John, the disciple whose testimony we have been reading just now? They were these : 'Behold, thy mother.' The word that came to St. John in the hour of his Master's supreme agony was a word that laid on him the duty of caring for a lonely and broken-hearted woman, to whom life had said its cruellest words. The shadow of the Cross lay upon all the service that he thereafter rendered to Mary. Do you see what it means? Do you read the lesson of it? It is simple enough. It means that the voice of the love that loved us unto death speaks to us in all life's common ministries of toil and service. We need that one supreme tragedy of pain and patience and love to keep our speech gracious, and our judgement pure, and our heart tender, and our will serviceable day by day.

XX

Sin and Sorrow

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me ; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the poor ; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God ; to comfort all that mourn ; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.—ISA. lxi. 1-3.

ONE Sabbath day, quite at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus came to the synagogue of Nazareth and stood among the worshippers. After the reading of the Torah, or book of the law, the presiding minister looked about him for some one to read the portion from the prophetic writings—the Haphthara. Any Jew of blameless life was eligible for this ministration. His eyes fell on Jesus, the carpenter, a perfectly well-known figure at Nazareth, and he handed to Him the roll containing the book of Isaiah that He might read therein. And Jesus unrolled it till He came to the words we have just read together. These He read to the people, and,

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handing the roll back to the minister and turning to the congregation, He said, 'To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.'

In the light of this intensely significant incident the interest previously attaching to these words is inevitably eclipsed. Their place and meaning among the writings of the second Isaiah are matters that invite and repay a careful study: but as one hears them spoken afresh by the lips of Jesus, one feels that hereafter they can have but one meaning to us, and that the meaning He gave them. We know that the earth has somehow been a fairer earth since He walked on it, and human life has shown itself to be full of sacramental meanings since He lived it. He made all things new. We can scarcely speak of Jesus making a quotation. These words had been uttered before, but the meaning was new. The phrases were another's, but the force of them was all His own. The sound of the words had been for five hundred years in the world's ears, but now for the first time the full glory and divinity of them was breaking on the world's heart.

So let us just now look at them thus. Let us hear the divine Christ revealing His purpose among men—uttering the great foreword of His life. We find that it deals with two things, things which are not seldom related as cause and effect. They are sin and sorrow.

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'The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.' You may say there is no reference to sin there: but that is a superficial judgement. We have taken this word 'poor' and narrowed it down to an application always too limited and often quite false. We have a materialized idea of poverty. That is because we have a materialized idea of wealth. Gold in your purse? That is a fool's definition. The beauty of the poet and the wisdom of the philosopher? Ideas in your mind? That is better. That is a fairer and nobler measure of the wealth of life. But there are hours when life's verdict stands that this also is the definition of a fool. It does not seem unfair to judge with one judgement—to pass the same verdict of impotence upon—the gold that sometimes cannot buy one hour of ease for body or for mind, and upon the culture that cannot destroy the fascination of sin, nor lift one shadow of shame from a shamefast soul, nor hush the wailing of a broken and a contrite heart. The good tidings Jesus brought to the poor were good tidings for all men. It is the race that is poor. It is humanity that has been disinherited, disendowed, defrauded by sin. It is the human soul that has been a spendthrift—a wastrel. By reason of sin we have all 'come down in the world.' We do not begin to rise, we do not lay our hands on life's real gain, till we come to that hour

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when we know that our only assets are penitence and regret. For that hour links our souls with the great foreword of Christ, and brings a promise of wealth to our sin-starved lives.

'To proclaim liberty to the captives.' Here is another view of sin—another aspect of salvation. If we have been material and superficial in our thought about wealth and poverty, we have been equally so in our thought about liberty and bondage. We have thought of the great house of circumstance, with its high walls of constraint and its iron gates of necessity and its barred windows of vain desire. We have looked at the man tied, as we say, to his desk, his counter, his work-bench, his bed of pain ; and we have turned from this vision and said, 'Now we know what bondage is.' But we do not. We know nothing about it unless we have seen farther than that. It is the tragedy of history that the cry 'Down with the tyrants !' has so often come from the lips of men who have never seen where the real tyrannies of life lie. They are not in the setting of life, but in the substance of it. When you have seen the crushed soul, the captive hope, the fettered will, the earth-bound aspiration—then you have seen how deep and terrible a word is tyranny. Then you have seen that the captivity of life is manifest, not when the tide of affairs sets us where we would not be, but when it

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makes us what we should not be. The lusts of life, the snares of mean ambitions, the bonds of discontent and evil habit, blind prejudices and cruel self-seeking—these are the foes of liberty, and slaying them we are free.

And the Advent message concerns ‘the opening of the prison to them that are bound.’ The prison is opened from the inside. Jesus offers to each man that freedom that abides in all circumstance and lies beyond it too—the freedom of the soul to find God, and in Him its own pure destiny.

‘To comfort them that mourn.’ Sin and sorrow are radically related. That relationship is not always easily traced in individual lives ; but as we grope our way back into the misty origins of this present order of life, this much seems to lie beyond question, that when sorrow slipped into life disobedience was holding the gate open. And surely it is wholly well that so long as there is sin there should be sorrow. The worst thing that can come to a man is the power to sin comfortably. If sin held open the gate by which sorrow entered life, sorrow now holds open the gate by which sin shall depart. Jesus in His life on earth showed He could do nothing for the self-satisfied, but He could do everything for the penitent. He could not company with the self-satisfied, but He could not leave the sad. ‘Blessed are they that mourn.’ Jesus

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does not spare the world the pain of penitence. No man can think greatly of his Saviour and lightly of his sin. We cannot smile our way to heaven. To see the glory of God is to take shame unto ourselves that we have so come short of it. To see the opportunity of to-day is also to know how blind we were yesterday. The folly of the bygone meets us again and smites us in the face. The evil done and the good undone come with stealthy tread behind us, and cast about our feet the snares of regret. And this is even as it were best to be. For it is to the men with smitten faces and snared feet that Jesus comes with the word of His grace.

‘To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion.’ These words lead us on from the lonely, shadowed place of penitence and regret to the place of vision and of service. It seems natural, and indeed inevitable, that in the waste places of his folly, his shame amid the wreckage and failure of his sinful time, a man should speak face to face with sorrow and see all his world through a mist of tears. But as he passes on, cleansed and forgiven and renewed, to join the company of them that seek to build the city of God in the earth, he finds that in that toil he must know still more profoundly the fellowship of sadness.

Sorrow is a most familiar figure in the streets of Zion. Her shadow falls across the path of them that

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do the City's business, her low voice is in the ears of them that labour to repair the walls of righteousness and to make fair and glorious the temple of the Most High. There is a sadness of memory. There comes to a man the thought of the days when he wrought not thus. But I am not thinking of that just now. I am thinking of the sadness of the faith. Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem. He wept for the blindness of them that knew not the day of their visitation, the foolishness of them that trampled the heavenly blessings beneath their feet, the hardness of them that passed unheeding on their brief and trivial business whilst Love Eternal was plucking at their very garments and pleading with their hearts. He wept over the wilfulness of the world: omnipotent Love mourned over all it could not do. My friends, there are grey and weary hours for all who give themselves utterly to God's will and work in this world. How could it be otherwise when the voice that calls us to this work is the voice of the Man of Sorrows? How could it be otherwise when the world seems to care so little for the best we can give and to profit so little by the best we can do?

But in this thing God has not forgotten us. The coming of Christ into the world means that through the gates of the heart's unselfish sadness we may pass into the unalienable and deathless joy of living.

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To go out into this world dreaming the fair dream of Zion, loving the pure law of Zion, serving the high will of Zion, fighting the precious, dreadful battle of Zion, is to be all one's days a son of sorrow, a secret mourner ; but it is also to know, as none but them that go forth thus can ever know it, the last deep gladness of life. You know that this is so. You, whose love for Jesus Christ (and more still His love for you) has taught you to love the unlovely, to know that there is not in all this world a worthless soul, a life God cannot lift and save, you have never paid the price of that belief in vain. For just when life is hardest and thorniest, a man forgets his wounded fingers, for lo ! they have closed round the rose of all the world—the rose of love triumphant.

There are two phrases in this message to the sorrowful—whatever their sorrows be—which, taken together, say all that our hearts need to hear. One occurs at the beginning of the passage and the other at the end of it. ‘The broken-hearted—the spirit of heaviness.’ Between those two phrases there lies the whole octave of pain. The suffering of life may be tragic ; but since Jesus has come into the world it need never be mortal. He came to bind up the broken-hearted. And that not only for their own sakes but for the world’s sake. And here let me ask you not to discount and discredit what I am just

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about to say by giving it a sentimental interpretation. There is nothing more able to understand the world's needs and to enter into healing communion with the world's sufferings, than the heart that has been broken by the coarse and bitter handling of the years, and bound up by the sure and healing fingers of Eternal Love. In the reckonings of man suffering is a disqualification for life: in the ways of God it is an equipment for life.

And then, at the other end of the octave of pain, we have what the prophet so aptly called 'the spirit of heaviness.' Weariness, depression, dejection; hours of the listless spirit, of languid purpose and disabled aspiration; the wings of hope not broken but too tired for flight. There is a tragedy here also, all the greater and more disastrous for the fact that we do not see it. It is a dreadful thing for a few hours to lose hope; it is almost as dreadful a thing for many hours to lose interest. In the matter of all that really counts, in the matter of gracious and availing help, one might as well be dead as dull. The spirit of heaviness spells inefficiency, ineffectiveness. In the world of the Spirit the way we do our duty is an essential part of that duty. A man may be dull and listless, and still work out a calculation of compound interest, or mend a cart-wheel. But to handle listlessly the task of teaching, warning, soothing, guiding,

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comforting human souls, is to bungle the work beyond the telling. Jesus came to fling about our souls—yes, about our aching souls—the garment of praise. He knew, and He would teach us to know, that that is the only garb fit to wear when one enters the house of sorrow or has some errand in the dark places of life.

And if you ask whence this ministry of comfort is to come and how the garment of praise is to be woven, I think you will find the answer in those strange words in the heart of this passage that tell us that Jesus came to proclaim the year of the Lord's good pleasure and the day of vengeance of our God. The good pleasure and the vengeance of God. Life can never be for any man as hopeful and durable as it should be till he has had some vision of one truth folded in that paradox. The coming of Jesus into the world has made it possible for us to take profound and patient and hopeful views of suffering—our own and the world's. God loves us with an awful purity that cannot palliate the sin of our lives. We must suffer for our sins ; only the vengeance of God is not to be reckoned as the vengeance of a man—blind, bitter, self-regarding, and fruitless. The pain of sin is an instructive and remedial pain. That is true of the single soul. That is true of social life. The awful sufferings of men and women and children,

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of the innocent and the ignorant and the unprotected, are things that none of us can take lightly or refuse to alleviate; but we need to feel that in the last deep truth of things this suffering is the witness of a justice that is never arbitrary and a love that is never weak. The vengeance of nature and of conscience, the bitter results of corporate unrighteousness, and the massed suffering of the world, are, if we could but see it, the stern-faced angels sent to drive us, as at the sword's point, forward to the day of God's good pleasure and the victory of love

XXI

‘Where was a Garden’

Where was a garden.—JOHN xviii. 1.

THESE words are sweet and pleasant words to say over to oneself. They seem to call back something very gracious and tender in one's own life. As a son of the manse, I have been somewhat of a wanderer all the years of my life; and my earliest memories are not of houses, but of gardens. I do not remember where I slept, but I remember where I played. The three-years' system is a thievish system. It robs us of a great deal that they only can keep who bide for a longer stay in one place. But it cannot take from me a faint, sweet memory of a place which, according to *Hill's Arrangement*, has more names than one and is both in the South and the North, both in England and Wales; which memory persistently describes in these words, ‘Where there was a garden.’

And some such memory is in every human story. We have grown up to the toils and the sorrows of

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manhood and womanhood. Our feet are in the dust of life's high-road ; and perhaps the simple joys of life's earliest years have so far faded from the memory that we but dimly and imperfectly recall them. But, thank God, no man quite forgets ; and I think when the details have slipped away and the clear outlines have faded, the memory that lingers can be gathered up in these five words, 'Where there was a garden.' Across the path of our pilgrimage there falls the light of our playtime. Yes, and are not these words about the garden part of the every-day story? We cannot live without our garden hours. We live among the many, but we need the few. We must have our communions and fellowships and perfect faiths. Surely no man is to be more pitied than that man who in all the world knows no place 'where there is a garden.' If a man's home is what a home is meant to be ; if he has found here and there in the world a friend whom he has learned to love without stint and to trust without a shadow of fear ; if he knows something of the fellowship of noble books—then for him this world is a place not all wilderness, not all dusty road, for he has found a garden.

Do not think, as you might perhaps be tempted to think for a moment, that thoughts such as these are unworthy to be associated with the beautiful and divine story of that garden across the brook Kidron

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whereof St. John speaks in the words we read together just now. When we speak of Gethsemane, we almost instinctively think of Calvary. The picture of our Saviour's love and ineffable agony has so completely dominated Christian thought—as well it might—that all other possible scenes in the garden on the slopes of Olivet have been almost swept from the field of vision. For all time Gethsemane shall lie in a dark, deep shadow. For all time it shall speak to men of the hour of nameless tragedy—nameless suffering. Calvary itself can scarcely show us a blacker darkness than gathered there when the Saviour of the world prayed that if it might be so the cup of suffering should be taken from His lips. But that was the last scene in the garden. There were other scenes. We do not find them pictured for us in the Gospels, but we can picture them for ourselves.

St. John, in describing the facility with which Judas was able to complete his traitorous mission, says that the traitor knew the place; 'for Jesus oft-times resorted thither with His disciples.'

So it had been the trysting-place of that little band of disciples. It had witnessed the sweetest and most sheltered hours of the Saviour's ministry. Even His feet were not always in the dust of the Syrian highways. He was not always in the press of the people.

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He needed the garden beyond the brook of the Cedars. And if in that last scene of all in the garden, Jesus passed further beyond the power of human vision and sympathy to follow Him than at any other point in all His earthly story, in many a previous hour He had drawn nearer to His disciples, had shown them more of His heart, and had wakened deeper and happier response in their hearts, than anywhere else beneath the Syrian sky.

'Where there was a garden.' If these words stand for that in the life of Jesus that you and I can least understand, they also stand for that which we can best understand and by which we live. I spoke of our childhood, our home-life, our earthly fellowships, and the ministry of all great thoughts written down for our light and help. These things all teach us our need of a garden, if they do nothing more. And not all of them put together can give to us all that our hearts crave for. From the garden of childhood the years drove us forth. In the garden of earthly communion unfaith can leave a man stricken, and death can leave him lonely. And the garden of noble thoughts and high teachings has scant shelter from the heat of the day, or from the tempests of sorrow and adversity. In that great poem that shadows forth the earliest story of the world, the man and the woman were in a garden, wherein God talked

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with them. Sin meant farewell to that garden ; and only He who came to take away the sin of the world can give to men the true garden joy again.

Jesus came into the world to give back to us the purity of the child-heart, to teach us how to become as little children. He came to satisfy our spirits with the grace of that communion with God that alone answers the inmost craving and utmost yearning of our human souls. He came to fill our lives with that warm light of truth which, unlike the wisdom of books, seeks us out and communes with us, and goes before us, a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path : in a word, He came to reveal to every man—the loneliest, the busiest, the weariest, the most travel-stained and sin-stained—the place where 'there is a garden.' We know that the life of communion is not bound by any conditions of time and place. We know that He whose presence made the glory and the gladness of the garden for the disciples said to them, as He says to us, 'Lo ! I am with you always.' But amid the many ways of knowing that presence in our life and finding the rich and gracious meaning of it, there stands first and highest the way of the garden.¹

That is the way we are taking to-day. They who most easily perceive Christ at their side in the toil-

¹ This sermon was preached on Communion Sunday.

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some road of their pilgrimage are they who most surely know the place where there is a garden—the place of pure and quiet communion with the Lord of their life and Redeemer of their soul.

It is a pity that, because some have held, and do still hold, false and mechanical views of the grace of the sacrament, we should hesitate to believe, and therefore fail to prove, that there is such a grace; and that in this act of obedience to His clear command, and in the devotion of spirit and the mindfulness and the humility that such obedience connotes, we may look to have communion with our Lord, higher in its privilege and closer in its intimacy than was theirs who sat with Him beneath the olive-trees by Kidron.

And we here, too, have communion with one another. This is the trysting-place of believers. We read how the disciples sometimes fell out with one another. They quarrelled; but it was always 'in the way'—on the road. There was a place where their dissension could not live. It was the place where there was a garden. No angry altercations broke the peace of that quiet spot. If they did not understand one another they respected and honoured one another there. They met in the heart of their Master.

They who draw near to the Lord's table are

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exhorted to be in love and charity with their neighbours. But the love that is in one sense asked of us ere we come is in another sense given to us in the coming. Out on the high-road of life we get drawn into many a disputation; we are guilty of many a false judgement and many a foolish claim. But we do not gather here to argue or to judge. Here we pass into the heart of that love that is for every man life's deepest need and truest wealth and farthest fulfilment.

And let us remind ourselves that great and solemn responsibilities are laid upon us in the place where there is a garden. You remember how that, to one man, the one great failure of his life—from which by the grace of Christ he recovered himself—came through the garden fellowship. 'Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?' Ah, Peter, in those words thou wast asked to pay the price of the garden privilege, and to be faithful to the garden fellowship and confession. My friends, these sheltered garden hours in our lives are no secret. If we frequent the garden, the world knows it. It remembers our profession, it remembers our enthusiasms, it remembers us at our best, with the touch of the Christ on our hands and our hearts; and in the day in which we dishonour that confession, and allow that enthusiasm to cool, and are so much below that best

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that was shown as we companied so closely with our Master—the world says, ‘Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?’ God help us to tread the high-road with the patience and faithfulness, and peace and courage of them that have sat under the olives in the Garden of communion.

XXII

A Crown of Thorns

A crown of thorns.—MATT. xxvii. 29.

IT was twisted together by the rough hands of some of Pilate's soldiers, and pressed on to the white brow of the tenderest man who ever lived. A bit of cruel sport on the part of a few barrack-room jesters. It gave half an hour's merriment to a party of men, in whom the finer sensibilities were wanting. We will not sit in judgement upon them. We cannot ; for wanton cruelty is not a thing of the past. Ridicule is found in the dictionary and elsewhere. The weak and the defenceless have still at times to be the butt of their stronger neighbours. There are flippancies that sting ; smart sayings that draw blood ; sarcasms that make rankling wounds. The point of a joke is sometimes a cruelly sharp one. People will have their snatch of pleasure, no matter who has to suffer for it, no matter how long that suffering may last.

Those soldiers had no special grudge against

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Christ. They had no particular desire to add to His pains. I doubt gravely whether they thought about His pains at all. They were thinking of their own pleasure. They saw the way to a few moments' mirth, and they took it. There was blood on that mirth, but what did they care? It served their turn. And to-day, at times, the laughter on one man's lips spells pain in another man's heart. Some people do not care a straw who is wounded so long as they are amused. Thorns are little things, but they can cause great pain—and the same is true of some of the world's so-called witticisms and clever gibes.

But you may say, 'Surely you do not presume to stand before a professedly Christian congregation and suggest a comparison between them and Pilate's soldiers mocking the Christ?' I suggest no comparison: but if any one of you feels that one might be made, then make it. And the more it hurts you the more good it will do you. Suffice it to say, there is such a thing as selfish and thoughtless disregard for other people's feelings when we are indulging the desire of the moment. The world is growing more polished and respectable every day, and most people are somewhat afraid of doing the incorrect thing; but there is a touch of pagan cruelty in the world's heart that no amount of outward polish and seeming suavity will avail to remove. Men are more

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afraid of appearing uncultured than of being unkind. Still there are those whose hands are so hard that they can weave thorns without pricking themselves ; and it scarcely occurs to them to think that others may be more delicately sensitive. There are those who, if only they had eyes to see, might catch a glimpse of themselves in that rough soldier-band ; and one look like that would mean a tenderer way of speech and deed through all their after-life. I know these are but poor words on a great theme. We have not said the last word about this crown of thorns. We have scarcely said the first. But what has been said needs saying, for the word of Him that wore that crown is this : ‘Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me’—and that is true, whether we offered a cup of cold water or a brambly speech.

‘A crown of thorns.’ Of all the crowns that men have worn, this is the one that will be longest remembered, most widely known, and most reverently honoured. It is more imperishable than gold and gems. It represents the highest kingship that the world can know—even the kingship of suffering. It is the chief insignia of the noblest kingdom—the kingdom of self-sacrifice. That scene in the common hall was vastly more than a bit of horseplay on the part of a few Roman soldiers. It was the corona-

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tion of the King of Sorrows. As Owen Meredith sings :

It was a thorn,
And it stood forlorn
In the burning sunrise land :
A blighted thorn
And at even and morn
Thus it sighed to the desert sand :

Every flower,
By its beauty's power,
With a crown of glory is crowned ;
No crown have I ;
For a crown I sigh,
For a crown that I have not found.

Sad thorn, why grieve ?
Thou a crown shalt weave,
But not for a maiden to wear ;
That crown shall shine
When all crowns save thine
With the glory they gave are gone.

For thorn, my thorn,
Thy crown shall be worn
By the King of Sorrows alone.

Christ sought this crown of thorns. He came to wear it, and He would have no other. After the miracle of the loaves the people would have crowned Him with an earthly crown, and He fled from them. He was afraid of them. He hid Himself in a quiet place. They wanted to give Him an honour He could not accept. They

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wanted to put around His brow the golden circlet of a brief popularity and a civic leadership. But He would not have it. There was ■ crown waiting for Him, and He would not be defrauded of it. There was a coronation day coming, and it must not be anticipated. He was going by a path that few would be willing to follow—unto an honour that few would be wishful to win. Oh, who is strong enough and brave enough to go on as Christ went—treading underfoot the golden crown of gain and reaching out after the thorny crown of sacrifice? He chose between the crown that glitters and the crown that wounds. He refused the one that He might wear the other.

That choice is in some sense ours to make. We have to choose between the two crowns. Too often it is the first that takes our eye, and commends itself to our minds. The painless, easy, earthly crown—lightly won and lightly worn. How many are wearing that crown to-day! It is studded with the gems of joys, favours, successes, pleasures, and gains. And they who wear it do not know that the lustre of it grows dim and the glory of it turns to shame. And worst of all, they forget that other crown that is held out to them, and miss the highest honour of all that is set for our earthly wearing—the honour of self-sacrifice.

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A crown of thorns : that was the outward symbol of Christ's triumph ; it was the coronet He had lived for ; it was His splendid bitter-sweet success. That is the only crown that the world has ever set on the head of utter goodness—moral purity, and complete spirituality, and self-forgetful, all-serviceable love. It has other crowns, dazzling to look upon and comfortable to wear ; but it gives them to the untrue, the unfaithful, the self-seeking, and the unprincipled. Let man forsake his duty and forget his ideals ; let him overcome the squeamishness of his conscience and go on the principle of taking the easier path, right or wrong ; and some day you will meet him with a crown on his head. The world has given him the guerdon of his unfaithfulness, and he is happy—and will be till the day comes when he finds to his shame that it was a tinselled deceit and a gilded lie. The crown that this world gives to the saints is a thorny one ; but the pain of it passes away and the glory of it abideth for ever ; for that glory cometh down upon the wearer's head from the city of our God.

Look at the thorn-pierced brow of the world's Saviour, and know that there are pains in all true conquest, there is a price to pay for all true mastery, there is no spiritual victory without blood. Oh, my friends, if any of us have turned aside at the call of

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the soft earthly voices, let us pray God to lead us back into the hard and narrow and safe way again ; if we have accepted the tawdry honour and success that men obtain at the price of some unworthiness or easefulness, some deliberate lowering of their moral standard, let us have the courage to tear that worthless crown from our head—let us wear rather the ashes of repentance and go on to seek that hard-won, painful, deathlessly beautiful, heart-satisfying coronet of spiritual self-sacrifice.

‘A crown of thorns.’ Oh, how these words should still the murmuring of our lips and the resentful petulance of our spirits! We cannot live without the breath of praise. We are always trying to snatch at our reward. It is almost a tragedy that we are undervalued or misunderstood. We want good words, good opinions, swiftly accorded recognition. We cannot bear a pin-prick. We cannot bide the most momentary opposition. The sharp and thorny difficulties or resistances have no place in our philosophy of service. They anger us, confuse us, dishearten us. We do not understand that the word that life speaks to the faithful is always a hard word. We remember that our Master was crowned ; we forget *how* He was crowned. We would be His servants—saving the thorns. There is a clause of selfishness in the bond of our service. We would spare ourselves. We feel

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every little slight, every affront, and as for ‘the long self-sacrifice of life,’ we love softness too dearly to make it. We shrink from life’s little pains, because we have not opened our hearts willingly to its great and precious pain—even the pain of full surrender, in bearing of which there is great reward. Some one has said, I know not who, ‘He that hath thrown the devil and all his angels can afford to be at peace with a meaner antagonist.’ And surely it is equally true that he that hath taken life service with the King of Sorrows, he who hath pledged undying allegiance to the diadem of thorns, can afford to bear patiently with the sharp rebuffs, the unsympathetic dealings, the painful handling, of a world that has not yet learned the kingship of suffering and the victory of patient brotherly love.

‘A crown of thorns.’ Can we not lay our sorrows at the feet of this sad and wounded King? It is not in the court of every monarch that sad faces and sad hearts are welcome. Gaiety and lightsomeness and gilded pleasures are found there as a rule. Yes, but the court of this King is not as the courts of other kings, even as His crown is not as their crowns. No one is ever refused entrance and audience if the word grief be found written in his passport. There are more sad ones than smiling ones in His presence-chamber. Yea, and the weariest, the loneliest, the

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most broken-hearted of all, are placed nearest the foot of the throne. And if you say to the men and women who are paying their homage, ‘What brings you here?’ they will nearly all give you the same answer: ‘Friend, I have had trouble.’ Yes, the crown of thorns is the guarantee of sympathy, the pledge of divine consolation.

My brother, if disappointment has left you scarcely a patch of blue sky, if some seemingly cruel circumstance has frozen the warmth of your heart, if quiet death has whispered all the music into silence, there is one place where you can find comfort more precious than your pain is bitter—the court of the thorn-crowned King who is with us all, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

‘A crown of thorns.’ This gives a new meaning to sin. It was the world’s sin—it was your sin and mine—that sharpened those thorns. All sin spells suffering, and the Sinless One could not bear our sins without bearing the awful sharpness of them. There is no wrong-doing that does not hurt the doer; and worse still, there is no wrong-doing that does not injure some other life; and worst of all, there is no sin that does not press the thorns more heavily upon the Saviour’s brow. It is an ill thing to look at our sins in the light of the law—it is an agony to see them in the light of the infinite love.

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There are sins that make us bleed because they have made some one else bleed. O God, if we could but fold back all the consequences in our own hearts and lives! And we cannot.

And there is no sin, no secret, unrelated, socially isolated sin, that does not wound the Christ who died for us. There is no secret thought of ill, no momentary dalliance with subtle wrong, no slightest departure from the path of high and sensitive morality, no brief and unrecorded despite done to our spiritual ideal, that does not add something to the sorrow of the divine Heart.

This is an age of euphemisms and moral softness. Let us never forget that there is no Christianity without the Cross, and that he who would follow Jesus Christ must follow Him at times with bleeding feet; and that a religion without thorns is a religion without love—for to love Christ and the truth and our brethren is to find wounds as deep as our own hearts, and reward sweeter than the glory of ten thousand summers.

XXIII

Fear and Joy¹

In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. . . . And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy.—MATT. xxviii. 1, 8.

THEY came with fear, and they departed with fear. But they did not depart as they came. There are fears and fears. Fear is a wide word, and may mean many things. It takes its meaning from the things that inspire and from the hearts that feel it. It may be the badge of a coward, it may be part of the inevitable penalty of ignorance, it may be part of the lawful price of the soul's vision-seeing. It may paralyse life, and it may establish and strengthen it. There is a small-minded, selfish fear that is a sickly and a pitiable thing to see. For that we cannot but feel contempt. There is a fear that dogs the footsteps of the ignorant and haunts unenlightened minds. It is a creature of the night; with the first faint glimmering of day it begins to

¹ Preached at the Manchester Central Hall.

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lose its power, and with the broadening light it steals away, shamed and powerless. Such fear awakens not our contempt but our sympathy and our pity. We have all known something of it in our own lives. We have all been afraid in the dark. Who does not remember what it meant in early childhood to wake in the night, what it cost to pass along a dark passage or up a dimly lighted stairway? There was more in those moments than constitutional timidity can account for. It was the soul within us that feared. The terror was not in the darkness itself; it lay in our power to imagine. We peopled those safe and friendly shadows with vague perils. Darkness was more than the absence of light. It was the presence of something—maybe of many things. We knew not what. So is it with men and women. The darkness is never simply negative. When we speak of the dread of the unknown, we use a misleading phrase. The unknown in itself has no power over us. It is just what the darkness is to a little child—a broad black canvas, on which the mind can paint its imaginings, its conjectures, its apprehensions, its all but formless fears. As the child grows older it learns to read into the darkness the thoughts it has found in the light. And so does God mean that we should so learn the beauty, and safety and comfort of life as He means us to

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live it in Him, that we may be able to interpret the darkness of the unknown in the terms of a clear and trustful experience.

But for all that, fear must ever be woven into our earthly life at its brightest and its best. There is a fear that is neither the token of the cowardly, nor the heritage of the ignorant or the imperfectly instructed. There is a fear unto which the selfish and the unenlightened cannot attain. It only comes as a man passes into the knowledge of God; into the baptism of hope, into the grander sweep of life's possibility and the more just estimate of life's eternal meanings that are revealed to us in the risen Christ. It is theirs only who walk in the light. It is the beginning of wisdom. It is a condition of the perfecting of knowledge.

Now, the words we have just read together might be taken as a study in fear. They take us back to the world's first Eastertide. The resurrection morning was the judgement-day of fear. It did not banish the word for ever from men's lips and the fact from their lives. It called the thousand fears of life to give account of themselves. Some it slew just where they stood. They were the children of darkness and of weakness and of shame, and they had no right to live. Some it cleansed and uplifted, and made them the friends and helpers of all lowly

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and faithful souls. And, most wondrous of all, a new and a holy fear came forth into the world—a true and steadfast fear of life.

Let us look at these things for a while. In the light of the empty sepulchre the arch-fear of the human heart, even the fear of death, was called by its name, and stigmatized as the crowning delusion of these mortal years. In that same light men have learned to see life more vast and solemn and significant than ever before it had been dreamed to be.

Let us look, then, at the coming and going of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. They came to the grave where they had buried their Lord; and where too they had buried their own hearts. They trod the path that humanity is ever treading, that leads to the great separation, the unanswering stillness of the end. Those women, making their way through the faint twilight to the garden of the Arimathaeans and the grave of the well-loved Nazarene, were one with all who have loved and sorrowed since the world began. They were passing by the path of pain that no man seeks and no man misses. We have trodden that path. We have brought the spices of the heart's tender thoughts to embalm the memory of a dear form and face. We have said, with them, 'It is all over. There is nothing left us but a few simple offices for the dead and the

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tears that are in our hearts.' We have entered into the grey silence, the utter emptiness, the mystery of foiled desire, and all the bafflement of the long farewell. And there was a fear in our hearts the foolishness of which can be seen so plainly, if we look at the fear in their hearts, if we go with the two Marys through the impotence and heartache of that Easter dawn. It was the third day ; the day on which Christ had said He would rise from the dead—would come back to them. And the promise He had already kept they had forgotten. Witness the spices in their hands. They had come to embalm the body, to remedy the compulsory omissions of an all too hasty burial. It was theirs to perform the last rites which the brevity of time and the presence of the seals and the soldiery had alike precluded, and then to leave their dead Lord in His last long sleep. How easily are these human hearts of ours blinded with pain ! The promise of His resurrection was already kept. The pierced hands were already lifted in the benediction of peace, and the wounded feet were yet again finding the steep ways of the world that could wound them no more. And the women knew it not. So there was the shadow of a needless fear on the path that led to Joseph's garden and Jesus' grave. They passed into the sense of irreparable loss and mortal pain. They walked in the heart of fear.

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And so do we. There has been a journey like that for most of us. And in our poor, blind, illogical grievings we say, 'It is all there—beauty, gladness, hope. I have buried it.' But it needs just another step to bring us where we shall 'find the deathless angel seated in a vacant tomb.' Thus it was with the Magdalene and her companion. A voice said unto them, 'He is not here; He is risen.' And in that one bright moment they passed from the fear that blinds men's eyes, the fear that walks hand-in-hand with hopeless sorrow and is own brother to unbelief, into that other fear that goes hand-in-hand with joy. They departed from the sepulchre with fear and great joy.

Those are the two things that you and I can find at the empty grave of Jesus. They departed with joy. There is a joy of the sepulchre. The stone has been rolled back from the mouth of the grave. We have been baptized into the sense of the inevitable and final victory of life over death. No longer can death dim our deep gladness. The bitterness of death is past.

O Everlasting Father, broad
Sun after sun went down and trod,
Race after race, the green earth's sod
Till generations seemed to be
But dead waves of the endless sea,
But dead leaves of the deathless tree.

Fear and Joy

But Thou hast come, and now we know
Each wave hath an eternal flow,
Each leaf a lifetime after snow.

As the two Marys went to the tomb of Jesus that tomb was everything. It was final. It bulked vast and dark in their minds and shadowed all their thinking. The world was a graveyard. All the trees were willows. All the music wailed and wept. But they looked into the grave, and lo it was empty, flooded with light ; and through the mystery of it all their hearts caught the thrill of gladness that comes to every man when at the touch of the Christ the false sense of the hold and tyranny of death passes out of his life.

It may be that some of you here to-day need this vision. To be with Christ is to be breathing the air of heaven and walking somewhere in the light of God's face. Let us not be dazed by a momentary darkness. Let us not seek the living among the dead.

But the women departed from the sepulchre with fear. They were afraid of its emptiness. They could have faced that wounded, life-worn form lying straight and still in its cool rock-hewn chamber. They could have performed those last tender ministries with deft hands and vaguely comforted hearts. But He was not there. The tomb was

Fear and Joy

empty, fear came upon them—a newer and nobler fear—the awe of life. It has ever been the empty tomb that men have been afraid of. It would be such an easy solution of things—so simple to be able to live without the disquieting whisper of immortality in our hearts—so simple to say there are no eternal issues folded in working days; and simpler still to lie down at the end of those days in an eternal sleep. But we have seen the stone rolled away and the Easter sunshine streaming into an empty tomb; and now we know that death is not a call to sleep—it is a call to life and work. We know that there is no meaning in life's hereafter that is not folded in life's to-day. We are wholly committed to our immortality. We are led out of the shadow of death into the solemn shadow of life. We are folded about, or shall we say caught up, into the divine continuity of it. The lesson of the graveyard has always been held to be the brevity of life; but the lesson of the grave in Joseph's garden—the empty grave by which we are standing this morning—is the brevity of death. Here we come to see that death is not a state—it is an event. It is something that happens in a man's life. It is our real life pausing for a moment to lay down the heavy hampering cloak that is buried. The pilgrim goes on. When we

Fear and Joy

say of the one whom God has called to Himself, 'He is dead,' we deceive ourselves. It is not true. Say, if you will, 'He has died.' That is the true statement. Death is not continuous, it is momentary. Nay, indeed, that hardly describes it. There is not one brief moment when there comes to life a complete cessation of experience and activity. Dying is an act of the soul. It is not something a man suffers, it is something he does. It is the immortal self laying aside the mortal garment.

And when we look at death like this, we immeasurably increase the meaning and weight of these passing hours. We lay the foundation for a wholesome awe of life. In the measure that we understand death we also understand life. In the measure that we lose the fear of death we gain the fear of life. The less death means, the more life means. When death shrinks to the dimensions of an incident, life attains to its true eternal proportions. When we see how Jesus triumphed over death, we are able in some sense to realize the continuity of existence and to feel the splendid burden of all life's deathless possibility upon our hearts day by day. But only to them that be in Christ can this be so. You may say a step is an incident; but if that step be over a precipice—or into a prisoner's dock—it is a tragedy.

So, my friends, let us pass this day into the holy

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fear and healing joy of the resurrection morning. Let us fear as becometh those who have been delivered from the false emphasis of death and given to feel the true emphasis of life ; for this is that fear of the Lord that is clean and endureth for ever. And let us rejoice as we remember for our great and endless comfort that He whom death could not hold waits to call us by our name, as He named the woman of Magdala in the garden ; to talk with us as He talked with two who walked into the country till our hearts glow, as did theirs, with the warm message of His lips ; to cheer us as He cheered the disciples coming ashore after a night of vain toil ; to plead with us as He pleaded with the broken-hearted son of Jonas, and to stand in our midst whenever we come together in some common act of worship and hour of communion, as He stood among the disciples on that first Easter even, saying in tones calmer than silence, ‘Peace be unto you.’

XXIV

Poured out unto the Lord¹

But he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord.
—2 SAM xxiii. 15, 16.

WHEN David took the water from the well of Bethlehem, which three of his finest soldiers had risked their lives to obtain, and, without even tasting it, poured it out unto the Lord, he performed one of those sublimely sacramental deeds that the world has never been able to understand, and that even the Church itself has too often misinterpreted. Viewed superficially, the act was open to so much adverse criticism. Some would say it was the act of a sentimental man—something unworthy a soldier and a man of affairs in the thick of a strenuous campaign. Some might even suggest that it was ungrateful—a poor use to which to put so costly an offering. Some might find a savour of paganism in that votive libation. Without attempting to deal with

¹ This was Mr. Ainsworth's last sermon, and was preached at Eccles Wesleyan Chapel on May 23, 1909.

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such criticism in detail, let us see what that deed of David's really stood for—and seeing that, find an answer to it all.

David looked at the water, and lo ! it was blood-red in his eyes. 'This is not water. This is the life's blood of three of my bravest. This is the chalice of that love that can look with a smile into the face of death. This is the sacrifice of three brave souls. I am not worthy to drink of this cup. I, who have been selfish and unfaithful, have no right to touch this offering—this sacrament of unselfishness and fidelity. I can but offer it to the God of all beautiful and deathless things.' It was an intensely religious act, and it tells us first of all that it is the office of religion to help men to see.

Probably no claim of religion has been better proved and more persistently denied than its claim to bring vision. It unveils life's sacraments. Worldliness is the negation of sacraments; but that is because worldliness is the only unsacramental thing in all the world. The worldling says that that is a loaf of bread on his table, and he has said all. But there are some that say that bread is Providence—that bread is daily mercy. For some this is a miracle of the loaves. The worldling says a rose is a rose—unless you are a grower of roses, and then you can give it a name. But a man does not understand

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roses because he is a gardener. Neither horticulture nor botany can teach you half there is to know about flowers. There are some to whom a rose is a parable of deathless beauty, one syllable in God's explanation of Himself to men.

Let us test this man once more, and this time much nearer to the core of tremendous reality. Let us pass with our worldling to the place where some tired pilgrim of faith lies in the last earthly sleep. What do you call that? 'Oh, that is death. That is the end. That is life finished. That is the long silence and the impenetrable darkness. That is the dark inevitable thing that no man can think upon without fear.' But there be not a few who say that that is life, that is the beginning—the true awakening. There be some for whom that room is full of light across which no shadow shall ever fall.

My friends, as David saw, in that simple drink of water, the sacrament of a love of which he dared not count himself worthy, so must we come to see that all the best things in life, simple though many of them be, are too good for us. We are not fit to hold them in our hands, saving as an offering unto the Lord. The tender love and ungrudging devotion of our parents, the loyal, unselfish service of our friends, our share in the loveliness and wisdom of the years, the draughts of joy and hope and fulfilment that are

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held out to us, how do we receive these things? As commonplaces, as obvious rights. Oh, that we could see the red, red stains of the heart's sacrifice on all these things! Would that we could find the sacramental meaning of all that has ever been done for us for love's sake—the daring and the drudgery alike!

Yes, and we need this vision when we look beyond our own personal history. We accept all too thoughtlessly the sacrificial service of art and literature, of science and civilization, and most of all of religion itself. The rights of citizenship, the baptism of light, the liberty of worship, the freedom of conscience, the moralization of power and the adjustment of privilege—these things have grown common in the using. By some they are held scarcely worth taking. But there is blood upon them all. Other men bled that we might go unwounded. Other men lived their lives in the shadow of death that we might live ours in the light of safety and of peace. Indeed there is not a good thing of all that goes to make the truest worth of life—I say there is not one, whether it comes to us from the very field of slaughter, or down the long, dim avenues of human patience and fidelity and service—that has not the red seal of love upon it. It only wants the vision of the pure heart, the reverent spirit, to see how that our advantages, our rights, our liberties, our privileges, are being harvested to-day from

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fields where once the dew was blood-red. If we truly appreciate them we shall not merely use them, we shall use them not for ourselves ; and by the grace of compassionate and selfless living we shall pour them out unto the Lord.

And when we see the Cross of suffering love shadowing all human history, when we trace the law of sacrifice through every form of human development and advance, we are the better prepared to feel how fundamental and inevitable was the thought of the Cross of Jesus Christ. The water from the well of Bethlehem, brought to David through the shadow of death, leads us on to think of that other water from the well of salvation, whereof he that drinks shall thirst no more, brought unto us through the central darkness and the ineffable bitterness of death by the Redeemer. Let us not limit the meaning and localize the effect of His sacrifice. The joy of a pure and instructed childhood, the dignity of the day's work, the highest things in the relation of life to life, the compassionate treatment of weakness and pain, the gentleness of death, and the hope that is ours in the day of mourning, all alike come to us through the baptism of blood, the chrism of God's unselfishness.

So it comes to this : true piety sees the life-blood of love sprinkled upon all life—the beautiful, the

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strong, the serviceable, the joy-giving, the enduring ; and seeing it there, learns that life is too precious a thing to keep to oneself, to debase with low aims, to handle carelessly, or to spend meanly. There is but one thing to be done. It must be given to God—poured out unto Him day by day as David poured out the water consecrated by heroism and devotion.

And it is not until we attain this view, not until the sacramental meaning of life really possesses us, that for us the redemption of life can be said to have begun and the worth of life to have been discovered. It is just here that the difference between religion and irreligion is made manifest ; and, whatever the world may say, that is the difference between success and failure. ‘And David longed and said, Oh, that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate. And the three mighty men brake through the hosts of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David.’ What if the story had ended there, or what if the last sentence had been, ‘And he drank of it’? What if that had been all there was to tell? As far as David himself was concerned, it would hardly have been worth telling. It is, doubtless, a creditable reflection on David’s character that these men were ready to die for him. It would be in any case a stirring tale of

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three soldiers ready to lay down their lives for their leader's sake—telling us what earthly love and heroism have told us from the beginning, and lifting us just as high as these things can lift us. But broken off at the point at which I have just broken it off, or concluded in the way I have suggested, it has lost its divinity, its deathless appeal to the human heart, its power to search our utmost souls and set before our eyes life's fair, immortal goal.

'Nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord.' As David took the water-skin with its precious burden into his hands, he had in his power the fulfilment or the frustration of a splendid deed. It lay with him whether the end of that story should be an act of physical satisfaction or an act of divine worship. Had he raised it to his lips, then selfish pleasure, merely personal gain, dull and unprofitable utility, would have won the day. But he poured it out. The hot sand sucked it up in a moment. It served no purpose that the eyes of a worldling could perceive. And in that seeming waste, in that apparent failure to make the most of a gift that was in his very hands, David showed, once and for ever, that he knew the hidden and eternal worth of the gift, and he caused its most precious meaning to shine forth in the eyes of men.

One of the most striking and tragic things that we

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ever behold in the long and varied pageant of life is the failure of success. The flower withers just as it should have burst into blossom ; the speech dies away in selfish mutterings just as we were ready for its crowning utterance. The life-story of so many breaks off before it gets to this last sentence, ‘He poured it out unto the Lord.’ I know that sometimes the life-story seems to break off a good deal earlier than that. It is not given to every one to hold in his hands the draught from the well of desire. Some seem to have nothing to offer to God but unsatisfied longing, disappointed hope, and frustrated endeavour. The heart’s soliloquy is not always overheard and fulfilled, as was David’s that day, when all his thought was toward the well of Bethlehem. And there is a way to God and the eternal good and the splendid divinity of life through all this side of things.

All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
This I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

But after all, a good deal of the earthly story is made up of asking and receiving ; of longing for something and getting it. Soon or late comes the draught from the well of fulfilment. Every day gifts of opportunity, influence, position, are coming to men as the result of their endeavours, conditioned by that which the

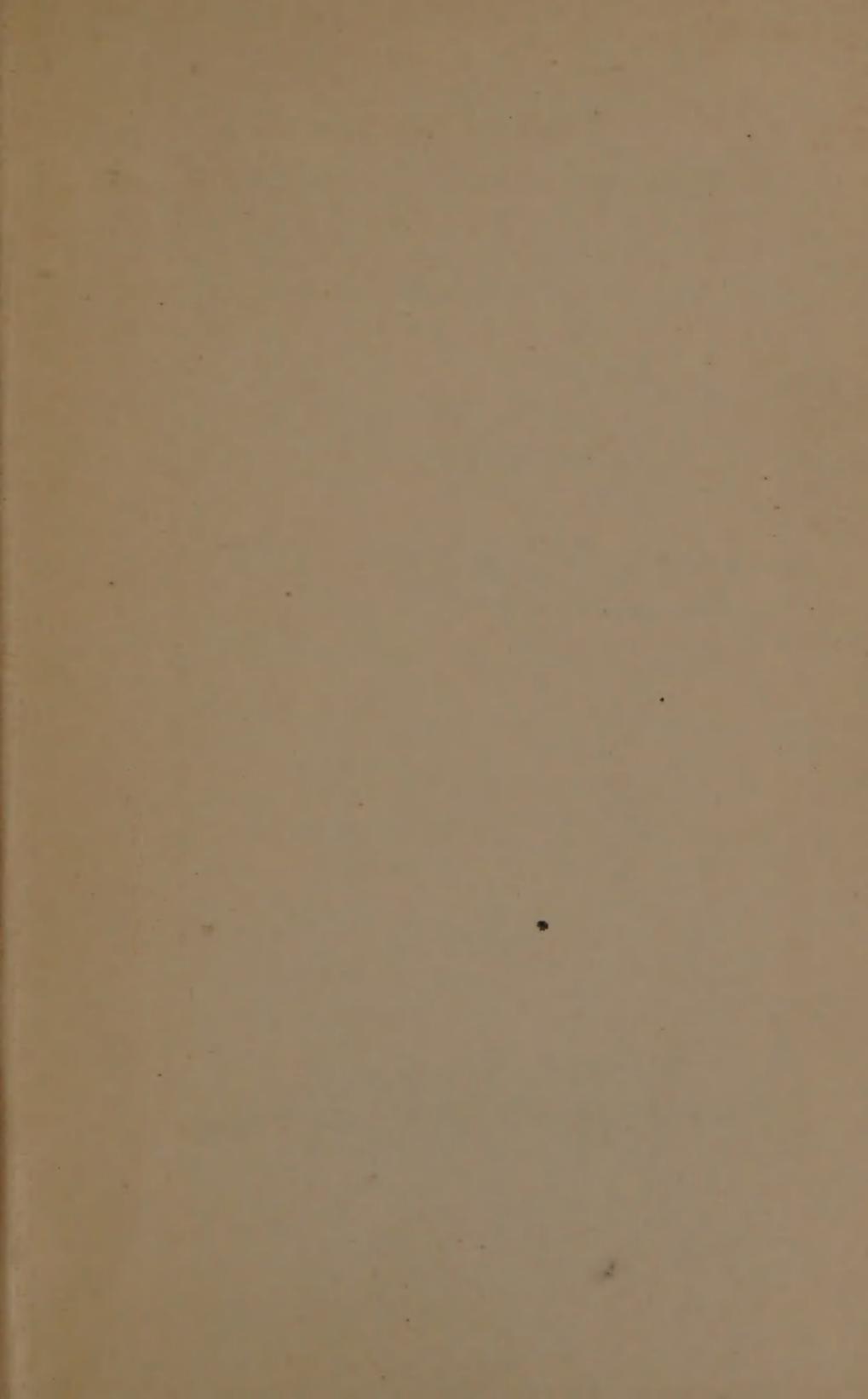
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Church calls providence and the world calls fortune. The poor man emerges from his poverty, the dependent becomes independent, the sick man grows strong again, the lonely heart finds love. When these things come to pass men see in the clear, cool draught, just an opportunity of quenching their thirst. And so just when life should have become a sacrament of gratitude and worship it becomes an unperceived but none the less pitiable fiasco. Our life's history will make poor and shameful reading in the light of the other world, if it does not have this redeeming sentence graven on all the having and the holding, the bounty and the boon : 'He poured it out unto the Lord.' We cannot sanctify our longings if we are determined to satisfy them.

And now, my friends, ere we leave this ancient picture and its deathless lesson, let us remind ourselves that for us there is one supreme way in which the veil can be lifted from off the face of common things, and we can see the passion and patience and divinity and eternity hidden in daily service—one way in which water in the cup of life can be made to run red in our eyes. Once let a man see the red track of Christ's bleeding feet in the path, where for him the flowers of peace blossom and the fruits of grace ripen—let him see the beautiful red seal of sacrifice stamped upon civilization and social life, and just as truly on all his per-

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sonal blessings and privileges—and after that he knows that joy and strength, success and hope, are built upon a supreme tragedy of love, that the cup of life is the cup of a sacrament, and that nothing is truly ours or truly beautiful till we give it to God.





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